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# *The man outside*

Wyndham Martyn

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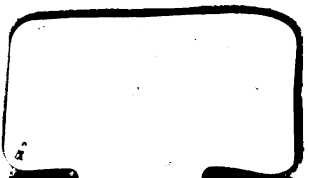

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# THE MAN OUTSIDE

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"'I'd rather talk about you,' he answered frankly"
(Page 134)

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# The Man Outside

*By* WYNDHAM MARTYN

With Four Illustrations in Color

A. L. BURT COMPANY
Publishers New York

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## CHAPTER ONE

### THE NOBLEMAN

To see the girl one is to marry—however cool and collected one may have been in many trying situations—sobbing an eternal farewell in the arms of a close friend is apt to be a trifle disconcerting, to say the least, to any man. Yet that was precisely what happened to John Paget Courtnaye Trevenose, Viscount Mountcastle; moreover, it was at a time when he was feeling particularly happy; and what, perhaps, more than any one thing lent him this happiness, was the fact that, after three years of service with his regiment, he was home again with a year's leave of absence.

He had spent most of the day in visiting the old farmers, friends of his youth, whose little farms were his father's property, and one day would be his. And now with the scent of the spring in the air, the cowslips scattered in the grass, and the Atlantic showing none of the menace that too often on that western coast spelled disaster to the little fishing boats which put out from the tiny, almost enclosed, harbour, he was cantering gaily, along the close wind-shorn turf by

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the edge of the cliff, on his way to an old cross which stood in a hollow of the hills and had enjoyed a certain semi-mystic reputation for centuries. On one side of this cross—a Greek cross of the ninth century and known as St. Vian's—the seeker might find, were he painstaking enough, the inscription "*Vianatus fecit hanc crucem pro anima sua.*" But who this old saint was who erected the cross for the good of his soul no saints' calendar showed; nevertheless, never a peasant girl in the neighbourhood but came to it with an air of reverence, for it was said that no man who vowed his love beneath its shadow had ever broken faith.

Now it must not be supposed that Lord Mountcastle was visiting the cross to make his vows beside it; they had been made, as a rule, in far less rustic spots. To him, St. Vian's cross was merely a part of the old associations and memories of his boyhood. And, immersed in these, he let his old chestnut hunter—the steed, perhaps, reserving any flashes of ardour for the glad time when the hounds were running—move along about as he pleased. And so silently did his hoofs tread the soft turf that, as luck would have it, he brought his rider to the top of the steps leading down to the cross without disturb-

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ing a couple who were sitting on the granite base of the weather-beaten relic.

The girl, golden-haired and slender, wore a dark blue riding habit, and the man, soldierly and strong, also in riding togs, was talking earnestly. And then before Mountcastle, too startled to speak, could make his presence known, the man had thrown his arms about the girl, and she had burst into a passion of weeping. It was all plain enough—rather too plain to the unfortunate Viscount, involuntarily watching and listening—that Mildred Heronhurst loved this Captain Ganton, though she was not going to marry him, being apparently wholly under the influence of her mother, who coveted a title and Mountcastle's great possessions for her. Furthermore, it was not difficult to gather that Ganton was making this his last good-bye.

The Viscount's position was certainly an unenviable one. He was pondering just how to make the two aware of his presence, when his horse saved him the trouble by whinnying gently to two horses, hidden from sight, which were tethered behind some clumps of gorse.

At the sound, Ganton sprang quickly to his feet, while the girl, who for some reason or other seemed much less startled than her companion,

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rose slowly, retaining her hold on his arm. As far as time was concerned, it took the surprised couple only a few seconds to adopt a somewhat less compromising attitude, but these were sufficient to enable the Viscount to control his feelings and conceal effectively his chagrin. At once, then, the situation had changed, the boot was on the other leg, so to speak, and it was impossible for the embarrassed lovers, waiting in silence until he had tied his horse, not to note the serene smile on the Viscount's face as he came slowly down the steps towards them.

Mountcastle seated himself on a turfy ledge and coolly lit a cigarette. Then he waved his arms generally to the scenery and remarked:

"Just the right sort of a stage setting for this sort of thing: The old lovers' cross, spring flowers, birds singing and a blue sky. You did it rather well, too. Not the first rehearsal, eh?"

"I don't know what you heard," said the man slowly, "but I am going away to-night, and, remember, I loved her long before she was engaged to you, Mountcastle."

"Is that true, Milly?" demanded Mountcastle, a little sadly.

The girl nodded.

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"And in spite of it you were going to marry me," Mountcastle continued. "Thank you kindly, Milly."

"It wasn't her fault!" cried the Captain excitedly. "How can she stand against the Marchioness? Her mother,—oh, you know her mother, Mountcastle! Can't you see that she has hardly dared to call her soul her own?"

Mountcastle looked at the slight, shrinking girl and then thought of that imperious lady, her mother, tall, Roman-nosed, fiery and intractable.

"We'll dismiss her ladyship for the moment," he returned, and his tone was quite friendly, "and come back to you, Ganton. The question is: What are you going to do?"

"My boat leaves in a week's time. I join my regiment at Chatham to-morrow."

Mountcastle laughed softly.

"What! After all these vows made by St. Vian's Cross?"

"That isn't kind of you," said the girl, speaking for the first time. "You know that what he has said is true."

"Good Heavens!" cried Mountcastle. "Kind! I am chidden for not being kind when I find mine own familiar friend has supplanted me in the affections of my fiancée!"

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"I loved him long before we were engaged," she said steadily. "I shall always love him."

"That seems pretty final," said the Viscount. "Breathed in the hearing of the old Cross, I don't see any way out of it except for Ganton to take my place at the altar. I can assure you, my dear Mildred, that deeply as I respect you, I am not the man to marry—knowingly, at all events—a woman who is in love with someone else." He rose to his feet and had passed half way up the steps, when suddenly he turned.

"Ganton," he went on, "if you will make it convenient to drop in for a game of billiards after dinner to-night, we'll talk this matter over."

The girl looked quickly at one and then the other. It was evident that she feared some ill ending to such a meeting.

"Don't be frightened, Milly," said Mountcastle quietly. "Before a duel there are many little formalities to go through. Playing billiards isn't one of them." He turned to the man. "You'll come?"

"Yes," said Ganton; "you can expect me at nine."

Mountcastle tightened the girth of his hunter and stroked his ear gently.

"Rufus, my son," he remarked confidentially,

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"it seems to be a case of grin and bear it—but what are we going to say to the Earl?"

With which unusual remark he took a cross-country route to the Tudor mansion, which was the principal country seat of his family, and presently came into his father's presence.

The Earl of St. Vian was a singularly handsome man of sixty, who for the sins of his ancestors, aided in some degree by his own discretions, was laid fast with gout. He had been the hardest rider in a set of hard-riding men, and the prospect of a retired life which necessitated the constant contemplation of a bandaged foot might have spoiled the temper of a better man.

But gout had not spoiled his temper. It was not that he looked upon his affliction as the work of a singularly unforgiving Providence, but rather that he was possessed of the certainty that by rigorous dieting and the supervision of Dr. Bagot, his physician, he would yet baffle his ailment and return to the world of men, the one man of his contemporaries to do so.

He looked up as his son entered and his face brightened.

"Glad to see you," he said. "My boy, you are the one person I know who never takes things seriously. It's your greatest charm."

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"Thanks," laughed Mountcastle.

"I've never been able to fathom the reason of it," supplemented his father. "Now your brother is so serious that the clerical life yawns for him."

"I'm serious now," returned Mountcastle. "In fact, I think you'll be serious, too."

"What is it?" demanded the Earl quickly.

"A two-line item in the *Morning Post*."

"To-day's *Morning Post*?"

"It's not yet put in," answered his son. "When it is, it will read that the marriage arranged between Viscount Mountcastle, eldest son of the Earl of St. Vian, and Lady Mildred Heronhurst, third daughter of the Dowager Marchioness of Morwenstowe, will not take place."

"Why not?" snapped the other.

"She's in love with Ganton. I heard her say she hated me. Pleasant, wasn't it?" Mountcastle sighed a little wearily. "They were at the Cross saying good-bye. I overheard accidentally. I'm very glad I did."

"Glad? You were glad? What do you mean?"

"I've always had a suspicion that I wasn't a free agent. I kissed Milly under the mistletoe as I've kissed other girls, you know, when her

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mother burst in and congratulated me. She always overawes me a little, and before I knew it, well, I was engaged. Of course I've always been awfully fond of Milly, but when I saw her kissing Ganton and saw how frightfully unhappy they both were, I felt relieved—delighted."

"You're charitable," growled his father, who took the news badly.

"Delighted at my escape, I mean."

The Earl looked more or less doubtful.

"Of course you feel this, although you pretend you don't. But, well, I'm very fond of Milly. Don't be too hard on her. Her mother is the very devil when it comes to having her own way. She very nearly married me herself when I was your age. The very recollection makes me nervous now."

"I shall certainly be far from hard," answered Mountcastle. "Believe it or not, I was very pleased to find it out in time. I've been away from home for three years, and, well, the love letters I wrote and the love letters I received were not quite the sort one reads in novels. When I tried to be affectionate, Milly took those epistles as highly humorous. In return she wrote about hunting and fishing. That's all very nice, but——"

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"But what?" demanded his father.

"Hardly what one looks for."

"Your fault entirely!" cried the Earl. "Why, you never paid her the compliment of being jealous. I have often wondered how long she would stand your mild affection. Had she been your sister you would have been a model brother, but one's fiancée——"

"I know, I know," said Mountcastle.

"Nothing of the sort," asserted the Earl. "How should you?"

"My dear father," Mountcastle said calmly, "if you had seen those two people saying good-bye it would have shown you that there is more in Milly than we think there is. I realised then that I didn't know the girl a bit. It was beautiful in its way. At first I was staggered, but very soon I knew that I had had a lucky escape from marrying a girl who was as much in love with another man as she. For a few minutes, I assure you, I felt thoroughly serious."

"What's to be done now?" It was plain that the Earl was far from being satisfied that his son was not meditating some revenge.

"First of all," replied the other, "we must make it possible for them to marry. You were telling me that lots of the London ground rents

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fall due this year. That makes us richer than ever, I suppose?"

"I confess," retorted the Earl, "that your vagrant thoughts escape me. Why?"

"I want you to settle something on Mildred on condition of her marrying Ganton. The Marchioness will be angry, but she won't be so angry if you settle something heavy. Milly's your god-daughter, remember."

"Mountcastle," said the Earl, with more emotion than was usual with him, "you're a very decent sort. I'll see that Ganton and Milly have enough to please even the Marchioness."

"That's splendid!" cried Mountcastle enthusiastically. "Ganton is coming in to-night for a game of billiards. Will you settle it with him so that he can go to the old lady and tell her?"

"You don't want to see him?" queried the Earl.

"I shan't be able to," said his son, evading the question. "I am taking the early train to Paddington."

"Running away?" demanded Lord St. Vian.

"I wouldn't put it quite so baldly as that," responded his son. "I prefer to say I am going away till the thing isn't talked about so much. You know," he added reflectively, "that in in-

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stances like these the victim—I am the supposed victim—comes in for the deuce of a lot of pity and some scorn. Nobody will believe I am relieved. They'll think I'm jilted, which is in a measure true. And," he made a gesture of impatience, "I don't want to be pitied and scorned."

"Then it has hurt you more than you say," observed the peer. "My dear boy, if it makes you serious I shall never forgive Milly."

"It's made me think," conceded Mountcastle slowly.

"Almost as bad," groaned the other. "What is the result of it?"

"That I am much to be pitied for being your son and heir."

"There are those who would change places with you," the Earl told him quietly.

"I am handicapped by it."

"It's not usually looked on in that light." The Earl was not prepared to believe that his son was in earnest.

"My dear father, you must see what I mean."

"I'm open to conviction, which is another way of saying that nothing you can state will convince me. Go on."

"I was to have married Mildred in September. But for an accident I should have done so, and

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Ganton would have gone out with his regiment, and, if he'd any luck, would have been killed. What sort of a life should we have led? Do you suppose this would have happened if I hadn't been a courtesy viscount and your heir, with three country seats and Trevenose House in Park Lane?"

"You're not bad-looking," laughed his father. "You have God's gift of youth. Why shouldn't it have happened?"

"Good looks and God's gifts count for nothing with the Marchioness of Morwenstowe, as you know," said Mountcastle impatiently. "Incidentally, I'm not good-looking, and thirty-two isn't the first sweet bloom of youth, either. It was your money and rank that did it."

"Well, suppose you are right?"

"Then you can only agree that I'm wise in not seeking another such risk."

"You are too much in earnest. In our class we cannot all marry for what is termed the love motive. There are consolations."

"I know," assented Mountcastle, "and I'm tired of seeing men go to the devil while seeking them."

"Really," said the Earl, elevating his eyebrows, "one might suppose you to have been

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reading cheap and popular fiction written by elderly ladies or unsuccessful clergymen. Pray, what does marriage mean to you?"

Mountcastle laughed.

"I'm not to be drawn into a discussion of matrimony with you. I only want you to see that I am handicapped. I am what mothers call a true 'eligible,' and I see now that Lady Morwenstowe simply bullied poor little Milly into keeping engaged to me. Like a fool I never suspected it. Eligibles rarely do suspect anything of this kind. The mothers guard them from it."

"There's one thing to remember, Mountcastle," said his father gravely. "You are my eldest son; and since your brother has seen fit to join the celibate high church order which he has endowed so largely, it remains necessary that you, at least, marry."

"I was coming to that!" cried the son. "If I do marry it will either be a woman who loves me as Milly loves Ganton, or else there won't be any pretence about the matter at all. It's intolerable to think that just because one has money and a title one may have put better men out of the running."

"I see your mind is made up. What is it?"

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"Even the men I know may only think me somebody convenient to borrow money from. They may even think me the damnest kind of a fool."

The Earl looked at him more kindly.

"I know men," he said, "and I can assure you they don't think that of you."

"I shall never believe it unless I can make friends as a man without rank and money. That's what I want to do. To mix with men and women as a plain, ordinary man. It will reduce me to my proper level."

The Earl became serious.

"My dear Mountcastle," he said, "that has been done often enough before. As a rule, I believe the guileless ones came home to die. Use your advantages. To throw them away is silly."

"You won't understand," returned the other. "The narrow escape I have had has frightened me. If I must marry I don't want a Mildred."

"I don't know if the Lord of Burleigh has inspired you," remarked the Earl, "but if so, you must call to mind the fact that the maiden drooped and died, crushed under the burden of an honour to which she was not born. They buried her, very stupidly, I have always thought, in

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her wedding dress, and altogether the whole experiment was a failure." He sighed. "What is it you want to do? Be definite."

"I want to take another name—for instance, my first two names—John Paget—and go where fate takes me." He laughed cheerfully. "The prospect is enlivening."

His father thought for a moment.

"I shall offer no objections, if you promise to write and tell me where you are. If you don't you'll be recalled."

"Of course I'll do that," agreed Mountcastle.

"When you are in your usual spirits," returned the Earl, "you will probably be very much amused at the reception you are going to get. The change from being an eligible to being turned into a detrimental would sour anyone else. If you were a philosopher—and a philosopher," he explained, "is a man who practises what he does not preach—you might add a chapter to the world's knowledge of snobbery. As it is, you will be bored very soon, and finding you need not endure calumnies you will be back within two months."

When his son had gone from the room he wondered if the fact of his own having been an arranged match had anything to do with Mount-

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castle's behaving in a manner without parallel in his family. He took from a drawer of a cabinet near by the portrait of a very beautiful girl —a miniature set with pearls. He replaced it with a sigh. It was not a picture of his dead countess.

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## CHAPTER TWO

### THE MAN

PREPARATIONS for the departure of John Paget were made with all speed. They occasioned some comment, even wonderment in the servants' hall. Mountcastle's valet, in particular, grieved at being told that he was to stay behind. True to his principles as a servant sprung from the lower classes, a horror of social democracy was the ruling passion of his life. That his master should set out unaccompanied by his man, and taking so little baggage, seemed nothing short of scandalous.

Mountcastle's parting with his father, as was to be expected, proved long and difficult. As a matter of fact, in the tedious journey to London, the son more than once wondered whether his venture might not turn out to be the failure that his father had predicted. Here he was, he reflected, bound for nowhere, in quest of nothing in particular; and as John Paget, he was without relations and history. No one knew better than he that to refuse to answer the questions which might be asked by anyone without discourtesy,



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would leave him open to grave suspicion. For no man or woman is so instantly suspected of evil as he who refuses to satisfy ordinary curiosity. These reflections, however, did not daunt Paget. He smiled to himself as he thought of it.

"If they want romance," he said half aloud—he was the only occupant of the little first-class compartment with the glass observation windows which is to be found at the rear of the Paddington Express—"they shall have it."

So when the London terminus was reached, he had succeeded in elaborating quite a pleasing history of the Pagets.

Also, he had determined that, since he was well known in the Mayfair and Belgravia districts and in the club region that clusters about Pall Mall, it would be wise for him to retire to some comparatively obscure part of town until he had meditated more upon his projects. He slept that night at the station hotel and sallied forth the next day to the not distant district of Bloomsbury—a land of boarding-houses and private hotels, of old-fashioned houses arranged in squares, whose gardens loomed mysteriously through high iron railings. No better place suggested itself to him than a boarding-house. John Paget would have no greater advantage in such

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a sphere than any other boarder; and he was still obsessed with the necessity of shedding rank and wealth and mixing for a time, at any rate, with men and women who might like or dislike him honestly.

There was one house which looked particularly clean and wholesome. The window boxes were filled with spring flowers and the curtains lacked the stiff, prim appearance of the houses on either side.

The landlady was, like most boarding-house keepers, one who had seen better days. But, unlike most of her sisters, she did not impart this fact readily. She informed Paget that she had only two rooms vacant. One would cost him four pounds a week and the other but two. Paget, with no sense of self-denial, immediately took the more expensive one.

"Before you take it," Mrs. Dean reminded him, quite casually, "I must ask for references. We are very quiet people here and I both ask and give references."

"What sort of reference?" demanded Paget, unprepared for this.

"Any responsible friend," replied Mrs. Dean with an ingratiating smile. "It's a matter of form in its way, but I prefer it."

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He hesitated for a moment and saw suspicion dawning. Suddenly he thought of his brother, the head of a ritualistic order.

"I can refer you to Father Trevenose, of the Order of the Blessed Meditation."

"That will be most satisfactory," said Mrs. Dean, with rapidly increasing respect. "You refer to the Honourable and Reverend Cyril Trevenose, of course."

Paget groaned. This was a bad beginning. Here was Mrs. Dean, who had been suspicious, looking upon him with marked favour because he had offered the son of a peer for a reference.

"I don't know him very well," he hastened to reply. "Failing that, you might write to Mr. Smith, the well-known butcher of Brixton; we were at school together."

"Indeed!" voiced Mrs. Dean, without interest. "I prefer your first reference. It is customary to dress for dinner. I trust you don't object to that?"

Reassured on this point, she ordered Paget's baggage sent to his room, and informing him that the dinner gong rang at seven, left him to his reflections.

At seven he descended to the dining-room and found that some twenty people were there assem-

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bled. Mrs. Dean introduced him to his fellow boarders as Mr. Paget, of Brixton.

A young man who was busy scanning the menu looked up at this.

"I used to live on Effra Parade," he volunteered. "Where did you hang out?"

"Mrs. Dean mistook," said Paget, sinking into a chair between two elderly ladies. "I gave as a reference Mr. Smith, of Brixton."

"Smith?" queried the young man; "which Smith? Where did he live?"

"In Effra Parade," Paget answered, seizing on the only name he had ever heard in a locality to which he had never been.

"I don't remember him," said the young man aggressively, Myers by name. "What does he do?"

"He butchers," was Paget's prompt answer.

"Never heard of him," retorted Myers suspiciously.

"It's clear to me," said Paget with dignity, "that you do not move in the best butchering circles." He looked across the table at a mild old gentleman with faded blue eyes and a depressed appearance. "*You've* heard of him, sir?" he said, suddenly leaning over toward the old man.

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"Frequently, sir, frequently!" exclaimed the startled boarder, who rarely spoke, and was rarely taken any notice of.

Paget bore his triumph modestly and told the Swiss waiter that he would take white soup.

"You're wise," his neighbour whispered in his ear. He looked up to find a large fat-faced lady regarding him gloomily. She continued: "The clear soup is salt water and burnt sugar." She looked scornfully at her empty plate.

For a moment Paget was startled. Boarding-house types were new to him or he would have known that there was never a boarding establishment but possessed at least one person who eats more and grumbles more than anyone else.

"Give me," said the elderly lady, still in a hoarse whisper, "a full house."

"I suppose you play poker in the evening after dinner?" he hazarded.

"Poker!" she exclaimed. "I spoke of food. Look at that for a plateful!" She eyed her fish disdainfully.

Her manner was depressing and Paget turned to his other neighbour, who evidently sympathised with him.

"Ah," she said, "I feed on art."

"Not very sustaining, is it?" he asked.

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Miss James, who did the fashions for the *Morning Mail*, closed her eyes in horror at the suggestion. "Fields," she murmured, "flowers, mountains, everything that is beautiful in nature is food to me."

Paget looked at her doubtfully.

"Don't you feel it too?" she asked.

"I'm afraid I'm too material," he said, smiling. "I've never yet had indigestion, and I've found that it's the dyspeptic who eats all these unsatisfying things."

"I fear," said Miss James frigidly, "that you do not understand."

For a few minutes he was left in peace. Then the alimentative lady spoke in a loud and penetrative voice.

"I am not in the habit of moving in what you call the circles of butchery, but since you do, perhaps you can tell me why the price of meat constantly goes up. I know it does," she said, glancing at her plate, "because each week I perceive a smaller portion."

Some few boarders glanced sympathetically at Mrs. Dean, who was generally liked. Most of them waited for Paget's answer.

"I regret that I am not a butcher," he said genially. "I was a wayward youth and rebelled

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at work. Furthermore, I faint at the sight of blood, and have been since my seventh birthday a member of the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals. By its charter, as the gentleman opposite can tell you"—he bowed to the old man with the faded blue eyes, who bowed back with an old-fashioned grace and some trace of confusion at his sudden publicity—"no butchers are eligible."

Mrs. Dean took a hand for the honour of her house.

"Mr. Paget's reference to his friend the Honourable and Reverend Cyril Trevenose has satisfied me perfectly."

The alimentative lady looked at him with some show of regard.

"Why," she asked in her penetrating tone, "do you pretend to move in slaughter-house society when your friend is the son of our wealthiest Earl? I see something underhanded in this."

"I assure you, madam," said Paget desperately, thinking of the little love his brother had evinced for this worldling captain of the Hussars, "that my friend Smith will speak more kindly of me than Father Trevenose."

"He may have reason," said the alimentative

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lady, darkly. "I have found," she continued, "that pretenders seldom prosper."

The lady who lived on art nudged him gently. She had long admired the ascetic young Ritualist, who was at the time somewhat of a cult in London.

"Don't take any notice of her," she whispered. "Any friend of Father Trevenose is my friend. Where did you meet the Father?"

It seemed to Paget that the whole table was interested. He could hardly tell them that Father Trevenose had been a singularly ugly baby of less than a week when he as a two-year-old child had been introduced.

"In the mission field," he said calmly.

"Father Trevenose has never been a missionary!" exclaimed the alimentative lady, who was wont to grow irritable when her dinner was finished and breakfast yet a great while away. "He spoke at St. Martin's Town Hall last week and told the history of his life. He made no mention of missionary work."

The art lady looked at him reproachfully.

"I don't often support Miss Binns," she remarked, "but she is right in this instance."

By this time Paget was plainly suspected of being an impostor.

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"When you next see him," said he, convincingly, "ask him if he remembers that All Hallows' Eve in Mashonaland when John Paget shot the lion that was waiting at the foot of the palm tree for him."

"A lion!" cried Miss Binns. "A savage king of beasts?"

"A king of beasts who showed terribly poor judgment, in my opinion," returned Paget judicially. "Cyril—Father Trevenose, I should say—although three inches over six feet, has never weighed more that a hundred and fifty pounds, and then he was emaciated from fever. I profess to no knowledge as to how lions reason, but it seemed to me lamentably silly that he should sit there wagging his tail at a very thin man up a palm tree. I have had no respect for lions since."

"Hunger," stated Miss Binns feelingly, "must be satisfied. The reason should be plain to every one of sense."

"All the more reason that he should have gone for Smith, who hadn't a palm tree to climb," argued Paget.

"Smith!" cried the Brixtonian Myers. "Was Smith there?" He felt a certain pride that Smith of Brixton had also trodden the ways of Darkest Africa. "What was he doing there?"

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Paget looked at him pityingly.

"My dear young man," he replied, "haven't you heard this lady"—he indicated Miss Binns —"grow eloquent over the fact that meat was soaring? If this so disturbs her, how much more does it terrify Smith?"

"I am afraid," simpered Mrs. Dean, "that I don't understand."

"It's perfectly simple," Paget answered suavely. "What with meat trusts and American beef barons and Upton Sinclair, only the wealthy will be able to afford meat. Smith spoke on the subject recently at a conference at Lambeth Palace. The time was coming," he said, "when the Sunday dinner of the middle classes would be the watch dog filched from a neighbour's kennel. Smith loves dogs and wants to avoid this contingency. He has organised an immense herd of cattle in Mashonaland and was attending strictly to business when the lion treed the priest. Smith behaved with great bravery. Fearing to move lest the lion's attention should be attracted, he stood there like a statue for three hours. Finally I shot the lion, rescued the Father and made Smith my lifelong friend."

"It seems incredible!" exclaimed a timid

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boarder, who was making notes of this incident on his menu.

"To me it is plainly symbolic," piped up Miss James. "Maeterlinck might have used the incident. Father Trevenose, or the church, aspires; Smith, the butcher, remains cleaving to the earth, typical of gross man; while Providence employs you——"

"Thanks very much," interrupted Paget, cheerfully.

"—as the flippant, unthinking instrument of rescue," concluded Miss James, not to be denied.

"But what were you doing in Africa?" Myers seemed to have a detective instinct.

"I was with Smith," resumed Paget. "I have repeatedly asserted my friendliness toward Smith. When I learned that he was to make this perilous journey protected only by native servants, a good conscience and a walking-stick sword, I went with him. I don't see how in the name of friendship I could do anything else."

"But you said," objected Miss Binns, "that you made him your lifelong friend by shooting the lion."

"Madam," exclaimed Paget dramatically, "if

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you must know it, I was engaged by Mrs. Smith to follow him unbeknown and rescue him from possible dangers! Until I clasped him by the hand at the side of the dead lion Smith had never heard my voice, although I had followed him for three months. He was inclined to be suspicious of me and to doubt my good faith at first. But when he saw me go up the palm tree and rescue Trevenose——"

"Rescue!" ejaculated Miss Binns. "Wasn't the lion dead?"

"Don't you know," said Paget, speaking as to a small and stupid child, "that some people can climb up but dare not come down? There was the priest at the top of an enormously tall tree and afraid to look down for fear of vertigo. Smith couldn't climb. The natives were afraid of the evil eye, they said, so I had to go. There was only one way to get him down, and that was to beat him into submission. Trevenose has never forgiven me. He admits he couldn't get down, but he says I was too rough. And that's why, Mrs. Dean," he said, turning to his landlady, "Father Trevenose won't speak as enthusiastically of me as Smith will. And that's the reason also that his speeches don't go into that African trip of his."

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The timid boarder who had scribbled on the menu broke in nervously:

"I occasionally contribute to the *Church News*. May I use that incident?"

Paget thought for a moment of his priggish brother, for whom he cherished a not too brotherly love.

"By all means," he answered, stifling a smile. "I shall be most happy to give you additional details."

This complete readiness to vouch for a story which had a certain air of improbability about it reassured the entire table. Paget looked about him calmly to see what effect it had. For the first time he saw, or thought he saw, in the faded eyes of the affable old gentleman opposite a gleam of humour. Paget's heart warmed toward him. A minute later the ladies left the table, and, rising as they did so—an antic which seemed somewhat unnecessary to Myers—Paget saw among them one of the most beautiful girls he had ever chanced to cast eyes upon. He sat down and sipped his lifeless coffee with a frown. He was annoyed to think he had talked what he called drivel while she was sitting silently listening, when he might have seen her and even spoken to her.

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He could gain no very distinct impression in that half-minute, but she was tall, he noticed, carried herself regally and wore a gown of some soft, clinging, amber-coloured material. Furthermore, her eyes and hair were dark, and there was a soft, rich colour in her cheeks which made his heart beat faster as he thought of it. He opened his cigarette case with a vicious click and passed it across to the old gentleman, who hesitated a moment.

"Do you prefer a cigar?" Paget asked, feeling in his pocket for a case. A smile of contentment wreathed the old man around as he enjoyed the aroma of a cigar which was the favourite brand of Lord St. Vian. He presently forgot these two young men and heard nothing of their conversation.

Though undersized and given to the wearing of too much jewelry, Myers was not, as Paget saw, bad-looking. He was what, for lack of a better phrase, is termed bad form in the set among which Mountcastle moved. He was watching Paget through half-closed eyes.

"What do you think of her?" he demanded presently.

"What do I think of whom?" answered the other.

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"The girl in yellow. Isn't she a winner!"

"She seemed to me attractive," returned Paget, a trifle stiffly.

"Attractive!" Myers smiled in derision. "My boy, do you know that girl moves in a society you and I would give something to go in!"

Paget lit another cigarette before answering: "How do you know?"

"I've made it my business to," he said shyly. "She's an American. Her people come from New Orleans. Her father's a cotton millionaire, or was. From what I hear, he's lost some of his money in New York, but she needn't live in a Bloomsbury boarding-house, like the rest of us."

"Why does she then?" he was asked.

"Her aunt is studying something at the British Museum and is living here for a time because it's convenient."

"You seem to know all about them," said Paget.

"I do," returned Myers; "and I've had trouble because they're exclusive."

Paget smiled unkindly.

"They've snubbed you, then?"

"They haven't had the chance," retorted Myers. I don't know them yet, but I shall."

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Paget affected a lack of interest.

"Indeed!"

"You didn't see where she was sitting, did you?" asked the other.

"Somewhere behind me, wasn't it?"

"There's a little table there," Myers informed him, "which holds three, Miss Lloyd—that's her name—Miss Scott, her aunt, and a fusty old clergyman, who leaves to-morrow." Myers laid stress on the day. He seemed to swell with triumph. "So, my boy," he added, "I shall be the Johnny on the spot there, as the Americans say."

Three times since he had known Myers, Paget had been called "my boy," and it was a form of address he did not like. Furthermore, there was a condescending air that had made Myers disliked by everyone in the establishment, particularly the gentle, blue-eyed old man who sat opposite still puffing at the Havana.

Myers rose to his feet and laying an arm on Paget's sleeve with an air he considered at once bold and careless, he said:

"You understand?"

"My good young man," drawled Paget, "you probably don't mean to be offensive, but nature has triumphed over your desires, and I imagine

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that if you seek to supplant what you call a 'fusty old clergyman'——"

The silent smoker looked up indignantly. He had come back to earth again and was wondering how he could pay Mrs. Dean when this fell on his ears.

"Fusty, indeed!" he snorted. "Why, sir, Dr. Bond is a Fellow of Merton and a most estimable man." He glowered at Myers for a moment, but his look of annoyance speedily vanished. He had the misfortune to owe a trifling sum to him, and the wherewithal to repay was not at hand.

"So I imagined from his face," said Paget urbanely. "Mr. Myers here rather fancies himself in the rôle of a lady-killer. He has stage-managed the thing already. How much did you tip the waiter?" he questioned suddenly.

Myers coloured.

"Ask Smith," he replied rudely, and swaggered from the room.

Paget looked after him, a trifle amused, and turned to the old gentleman with a smile.

"Doesn't seem to care for me," he hazarded.

"He only cares for himself," snapped the other. "I have lived for many years in boarding-houses, and it has always been my lot to meet

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men of his uneducated, intolerable type. He is the worst of all." Then the look of anger faded from the old man's eyes. "Of course," he added apologetically, "I am old and unversed in modern ways. It may be I am unjust."

With a few words of farewell he passed from the room and Paget could not but notice that his dinner coat was very worn and shiny. He had never before been intimately brought in contact with genteel poverty and it made him thoughtful. He was roused from this mood by Myers, who came back arrayed in a startling smoking-jacket.

"Look here, old man," he commenced easily, "I didn't mean to say anything to hurt your feelings."

"Thank you," returned Paget. "I was not deeply wounded."

"All I meant to say," Myers went on, "was that I threw over my best girl in Camden town for Miss Lloyd, and I don't want you to interfere."

"Really," cried Paget, "one would think I were a rival in your affections! I have seen this lady only once and shall not be very much disturbed if I never set eyes on her again."

"That's settled, then," Myers declared complacently. He lit a cigar with a flaming band

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upon it which he did not remove. "I don't know her yet, but when I sit next to her she can't very well avoid me, can she?" he demanded anxiously.

"Why should she want to?" queried Paget.

"That's the very point," said Myers. "I shall just move across there and sit down. She can't say anything, and I'm too good a boarder for Mrs. Dean to want to offend. You see," he continued meditatively, "what women like is boldness in things like that. Ever seen Kyrle Bellew or Lewis Waller?"

"Yes," said the other; "why?"

"Theirs is the kind of way that fetches the girls." Myers had taken Paget's attitude for one of great and respectful interest. "Some people," added the ingenuous Myers, "think me very much like what Bellew used to be."

"I have not failed to note the marked resemblance," observed Paget gravely. "By the way, what is the name of the old gentleman who just went out?"

"That!" cried Myers scornfully. "He's an old fossil who has been working at the British Museum for years. These learned men are the biggest fools in existence. His name is Danby, and when he started on his blessed book he was so sure that he could sell it and make a fortune

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that he parcelled his money out to last so many years, while he was writing it. I met him last week trying to sell his library, volume by volume, in Charing Cross Road. Mrs. Dean can't afford to keep him. He owes her money and me, too."

"How much?" demanded Paget quickly.

"He owes me five pounds, and Mrs. Dean twenty or more." Myers chuckled as he went on with: "She won't get hers, but I took some books as security."

Paget looked at Myers with a scorn he could not conceal and said:

"You must be a very good man of business."

"Few better," admitted Myers promptly. "And that's why I'm having this understanding with you now. That's my business way of doing things."

"And you think," asked Paget, "that because of what you've told me I am not to occupy the seat next that pretty American girl? If," he went on, "you'll give me the young lady's Camden town address, I will write congratulating her on her escape from a damned little cad."

"What!" cried Myers; "from me?"

"How quick you are!" returned Paget. "Yes, I mean on her escape from you."

"I won't be spoken to like this!" exclaimed

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Myers with an affectation of the fierceness he wished he could feel. There was something rather frightening in the cold look which the other fastened upon him. Nevertheless, after a moment or two of, perhaps pardonable, hesitation, he took courage.

"You're no gentleman, sir!" he forced himself to say, at the same time not forgetting to draw himself up and assume what he believed to be the correct pose for language of that sort.

"But you are," returned Paget quietly. "And now as both of us have perjured ourselves, let me tell you that I shall not admit that you have any claim upon this Miss Lloyd; and, furthermore, I shall sit at that vacant chair to-morrow night, unless, of course, she or her aunt asks me not to do so—to protect her from you."

Myers jingled some loose change in his pocket ostentatiously.

"You don't own this place!" he called out, when he saw Paget preparing to leave the room.

By this time Paget was a little ashamed of his outburst. He turned to Myers less angrily and said:

"From what little I have seen of Miss Lloyd I should say you'd be wiser if you aspired less high!"

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Mrs. Dean was passing the door as he came into the hall.

"May I have just a moment?" asked Paget.

The landlady led him into a small, dark room where she transacted her business. Then she turned to him graciously and asked:

"What is it?"

"It's about Mr. Danby. He interests me very much. Can you tell me about his life?"

"Isn't it a little strange for you, a stranger, to ask this?" she returned.

"My reasons," he said, "are absolutely kindly toward him."

"He had a very brilliant academic career at Oxford," she told him, "and was for some time a fellow of a college there. I am sorry to say he is leaving me next week. I fear he has not been very successful."

"Thank you," said Paget, rising. "Will he be in his room?"

"Number 10," she replied, "the fourth floor. He writes after dinner."

It was a small room furnished plainly enough, and at a table in the centre Mr. Danby sat writing. He had changed his evening dress and was clad in a dressing-gown which had been much worn.

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"This is very kind of you," he said nervously. "Please sit down."

"Mr. Danby," Paget commenced, "one of my reasons for coming to this house was to see you."

Mr. Danby looked rather nervous. He owed a little money to various people, and many of them had odd ways of collecting it. For the past week he had been greatly pestered.

"If they will only give me time," he said with a voice that was husky, "I hope to pay all I owe. I am leaving next week for less expensive rooms."

Paget affected not to have heard.

"Yes," he said, "a friend of yours, who begged me not to mention his name, has recommended you as suitable for the post of librarian to a nobleman who wants his books recatalogued. The library is so large that the work will take some years. You would remain there permanently, I judge. I have been sent to town to send someone down into the West of England immediately. Can you spare the time?"

The old man's faded blue eyes filled with tears which he could not keep back. Perceiving this, Paget walked to the window and looked out.

"I had no idea," he observed, "that you had

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such a superb view." He enjoyed the uninterrupted spectacle of Bloomsbury's chimney pots for some moments, and when he walked away from the window Mr. Danby had recovered his composure.

With a few adroit questions, Paget learned sufficient particulars of his career to satisfy himself that here was a man admirably fitted to succeed the old clergyman who had formerly been his father's librarian. He named the salary which the other librarian had received, and settled Mr. Danby's doubts as to whether he could honourably leave London owing money, by giving him three months' salary in advance.

The next morning, pledged to reveal nothing to the other boarders as to Paget's part in the matter, Mr. Augustus Danby, former Fellow of Exeter College and Gaisford Prizeman, set out for the West Country, there to reside for the rest of his life.

Paget was not at home at luncheon the next day, but remembering his vow to supplant Myers, came to the boarding-house in time to dress for dinner. He had inquired which was Myers's room, and when that young man had betaken himself to it Paget produced a gimlet and screwdriver from his pocket, together with a long screw. Then,

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being skilled in such matters, since "screwing in" has been a practical joke played upon unpopular tutors and masters at universities and schools for many generations, Paget silently fastened Myers's door and went down to dinner.

He was early, and there were not many of the guests in the room, but Miss Lloyd and her aunt were sitting at the little table where was one vacant seat.

The girl looked up as he entered the room.

"Here's that new man with the gift for romance," she said in a low voice to her companion.

Paget made his way to their table and, bowing, he said:

"If I may, and this place has not been engaged for any friend of yours, I should like to sit here. I find it less trying to sit with my back to the light."

There was a glaring light over the central table, and Miss Scott, who was never disinclined to converse with strangers, smiled graciously and answered:

"That's the very reason that we sit here."

Nina Lloyd bowed very slightly. Paget was the last man she would accuse of eye trouble. Without being vain, she was perfectly well aware of her charms, and this was not the first time

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men had made excuses to be near her. Indeed, it was a tribute on which she had come to look as inevitable. But she had to acknowledge that this newcomer was one of the most imperturbably cool beings she had ever met. She had been an interested listener to his African adventures, and although Miss Scott, whose hobby was ecclesiastical lace and vestments of the sixteenth century, had believed in him firmly, her niece had other opinions.

Paget, as soon as he had the opportunity, looked at the girl and was lost in astonishment that Myers, vulgar, ill-educated and unused to the conventions of polite society, should have ventured to cast aspiring eyes at this beautiful girl. She was charmingly gowned, in a dull red costume which looked simple enough to his masculine eye, but which a woman would have known owed its simplicity to the dressmaking art which conceals art.

"I've always found," he began urbanely, addressing Miss Scott, "that in places like this, one never gets properly introduced. My name is Paget. I already have the advantage of knowing yours." His bow embraced the two women.

"Who told you?" demanded the girl suddenly.

"Mr. Myers," he answered.

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Her voice was fascinating, he thought. Used to believing that all American girls were possessed of a curious twang, such as he had heard from time to time from the lips of certain parties of young women, who, by the votes of their friends and the generosity of newspapers, toured Europe as the most beautiful or most popular girls in their localities, he was charmed to hear Miss Lloyd. That curious, delicious, haunting inflection of the New Orleans woman of the better class had an instant attraction for him. He looked at her with growing interest. Her profile, delicate, pure, reminded him of a picture he had seen by Leonardo da Vinci. She was watching Adolf, the Swiss waiter.

"The poor man seems terribly agitated," she observed. "He's usually as placid as an ox." She turned to Paget. "Have you been doing anything to him, Mr. Paget?"

"I?" he cried. "Perish the thought!"

But plainly it was at him that the waiter's eyes were levelled. He came toward Paget apologetically.

"I do not think," he said in his broken way, "that you like to sit here."

"Therein you are in error," replied Paget. "I like it too well to leave."

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Adolf muttered to himself and retired. He had an understanding with Myers that the vacant seat should be reserved for him for a certain monetary consideration. Dinner was half through when Adolf was beckoned from the room by some unseen person. Presently he returned and made his way to the side of Mrs. Dean. It was evident that she was anxious, and the name of Myers was heard. Nina Lloyd detected a smile on Paget's face. She also remembered seeing Myers give Adolf some money that morning, and she knew that Myers was desperately anxious to be introduced.

"Can you imagine what can be the matter with Mr. Myers?" she asked of him.

"I know him so little," Paget returned innocently, "that I could hardly guess."

The dessert was already placed upon the table when Myers entered the room. He walked to Paget's table and scowled.

"You did it," he said in a low voice not easily heard by boarders at the big table.

Miss Scott looked at him amazed.

"Who did what?" she asked.

"We had a bet," said Myers, "and to prevent my winning he prevented my getting out of my room. There isn't a bell, and I might have

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stayed there all night but for the cook hearing me shouting through the window."

The girl looked at Paget suspiciously.

"What bet was it?" she asked.

Myers, thoroughly angry, threw caution and truth to the winds.

"He said he'd sit here, even if you were as ugly as Miss Binns. I'll get even with him."

Myers took his accustomed seat, staring at the few people remaining in the room.

Nina Lloyd looked steadily at Paget.

"Is is true?" she demanded.

"Not as he says it." Paget could see that she was not pleased at the incident. "I sat next Miss Binns last night and I determined to escape. Do you blame me?"

"Not in the least," she answered. "But I wish you had not chosen to escape here."

"It can be remedied easily enough," he said, flushing.

She looked across the table at Myers. There was now nobody left in the room except the three at the little table.

"Mr. Myers," she said, "if you want to sit here to-morrow night there will be a vacant chair."

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Myers flashed back a glance of triumph at Paget as he answered:

"Nothing will keep me from it."

Nina Lloyd had hoped that this lesson would make Paget uncomfortable, but he had recovered his *sang froid.*

"Myers is terribly smitten with——" he broke off short, fearing that perhaps he was going too far; then went on again with: "It makes him unbearable. I interfered not because I wanted particularly to thwart him, but because I was sorry for you."

"Sorry?" she repeated.

"Sorry," he answered. "Try as you will, you cannot tell me honestly that you would like his company here."

"Preferring yours, then?" She laughed. "Really, Mr. Paget, you are the most conceited man I have met for a long time."

"Never mind; I shall always consider that I have gone down to a glorious defeat. Myers hasn't defeated me; it was you. I could wish," Paget added with a smile, "that you weren't quite so *difficile.* You dislike Myers personally, and yet you ask him to sit at your table."

She rose to her feet and put the silk wrap about Miss Scott's neck without answering.

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"You asked him to sit by your side and talk," he insisted.

The girl smiled significantly.

"If you remember exactly what I said, you will find that I did nothing of the kind."

Paget watched the slim figure walking out of the room beside her rather squat, awkward aunt, with an admiration that was growing momentarily greater, and sighed. Of a sudden he was sick of the whole incident, of Myers, of boarding-houses and of himself. An unusual sense of depression was upon him, and he sat down to finish his coffee.

"Ha, ha!" laughed Myers. "My boy, that's where you overreached yourself!" There was perfect friendliness in Myers's tone as he went on: "But I'm not angry—oh, no! I don't mind it now."

"Positively, you put new life into me," mocked the other.

Myers looked reflective. It was suddenly borne in upon him that his triumph was not yet assured; and for once he felt a little doubtful. But he soon grew brighter, and even deigned to pity what he considered was a defeated rival.

"It isn't figure or looks," he volunteered, giving Paget the benefit of his ruminations; "it's

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a man's manner. By the way, I want to tell you that I live in this boarding-house because it suits me, and not because I have to."

"This confidence is most complimentary—very pleasing, believe me, but why offer it to strangers?"

"Only to let you know," retorted Myers, "that I can afford to take a girl to the Ritz, the Carlton or Claridges. And there isn't anyone else in this place that can do it."

Paget looked at him for a moment in silence. Presently he said slowly:

"Do you suppose for an instant that that glorious girl—that exquisite, dainty creature, used to other society than this—would be taken out by you? Frankly, do you mean it?"

"And why shouldn't she?" sneered Myers.

"For many reasons. I don't know anything about Miss Lloyd, but there's something so thoroughbred about her, that you may take my word for it, she's one of those American girls who come over here and find all doors open to them. My dear man," he concluded, "my advice to you is to stick to Camden town."

"I'm getting to dislike you," snapped Myers. "You don't seem to understand I'm as good as you are."

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"Possibly," admitted Paget. "I make no boasts as to birth, breeding or money, but I warn you that the men and women who dine where you can afford to dine—the Carlton, Claridges or the Ritz—don't wear white waistcoats and white ties with a dinner jacket."

Myers looked uncomfortable. Despite a bold front to the world in sartorial matters, at bottom he was quite well aware of his limitations, and was exceedingly sensitive to ridicule.

"Furthermore," went on Paget, his eyes taking in the little man's apparel from head to foot, "pleated shirts for evening wear are only permissible in Continental Europe—not in London. And another thing——" He stopped and smiled a wider smile than ever. "But after all, Myers, perhaps your unconventionality may have its charms." And strolling quietly from the room, he left the other to look himself over reflectively before subsiding into a chair.

"I wonder if he's right," Myers muttered to himself dejectedly.

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## CHAPTER THREE

### JOHN PAGET'S FIRST ADVENTURE

ALTHOUGH Paget knew London well from frequent residence at Trevenose House, at the corner of Brook Street and Park Lane, the great Western Central district was utterly unknown. He had passed through it often enough on his way to the great railway terminals in the Euston Road, but these quiet squares and gardens, once the home of the wealthy merchant class and now given over to the homes of authors, actors and boarding-house keepers, were new to him. It was only a little past ten o'clock when he left Myers, and an hour's stroll seemed attractive. Slipping on a light coat and the silk hat of convention he made his way through streets that were wrapped in quiet respectability. But they seemed so much alike that presently he was unable to find his way back. A policeman standing at a corner told him he was in Woburn Place and gave him directions. At the corner of Tavistock Place he paused to light a cigarette, and an inebriated man observing him proffered a lifelong friend-



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ship. He wept when it was not received, and pursued his uneven way along streets that were mountainous and houses that moved.

There were few people abroad; the only sound that Paget heard as he took his leisurely way homeward was the pit-pat of someone wearing light shoes who was walking in the same direction he was pursuing. He glanced over his shoulder to see a girl holding a letter in her hand and pausing irresolute at the corner of the street he had just passed. He conjectured that she was looking for a pillar post, and would have thought no more of it had not another woman appeared upon the scene. Under the light Paget could see that she had been drinking. He noticed, too, that she was dressed in the tinselled finery of her class and every few moments broke out into filthy invective.

As she came to the street corner she saw the girl under the lamp, who shrank involuntarily from such close proximity. This action of repugnance only served to infuriate the woman, for with an oath she snatched the letter and attempted to run away. Very quickly the girl recovered it, only to be pursued by the other, who upbraided her foully. From his position in the shadow Paget saw that the two were being ap-

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proached by a policeman wearing rubber-soled shoes which made his approach noiseless.

"What's all this about?" he demanded gruffly.

"This here thing what calls herself a lady tried to snatch my purse," said she of the gaudy garments shrilly. "Strike me, if she didn't!"

"It is untrue!" cried the girl. And Paget recognised instantly the voice of Nina Lloyd. "It is untrue!" she repeated. "I was looking for the post office when this woman snatched my letter from me, and——"

"Oh, you liar!" broke in she of the streets, and fled clumsily into the night. The constable looked after her dubiously.

"What did you do to her?" he demanded suspiciously of Miss Lloyd.

"I've already told you," said the girl angrily. "I wanted to find the post office and that woman took my letter. You should have arrested her."

The constable scowled in answer.

"I don't want your advice," he said. "There's more in this than you're telling."

She stamped her foot with impatience.

"Will you tell me where the post office is?"

"You can post that letter at the station house," he said. "Come quietly."

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For a moment the girl seemed hardly to understand him; then, in a flash, she saw her position and tried to temporise.

"But I have done nothing!" she cried, white-faced.

He took out a notebook with elaborate importance.

"'Brawling in the public streets' is how it will read on the charge sheet," he said. "That's good enough for me."

"You are making a mistake," she informed him easily, "and I shall use my influence to have you reprimanded."

"Come and do it," he said, taking her arm roughly.

Paget had waited in the hope that she might be able to pacify the constable and escape the knowledge that he had witnessed so unpleasant a scene. But it was obvious that without some assistance the affair was likely to prove serious.

He moved toward the policeman.

"I think, Sergeant," he said with ready tact, since the man had not won his chevrons, "that you are making a mistake. I saw the whole thing and can swear that this lady was in no way to blame."

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The man was proof against any flattery and smiled unpleasantly.

"What, another of 'em?" he asked. "You know her, too?" He turned to the terrified girl. "Come along!"

"This won't do," muttered Paget. He took a sovereign from his pocket and endeavoured to slip it into the man's hand; but whether the officer thought it only a shilling, or his ill-temper rendered him impervious to golden gains, he refused it angrily.

"Let go my hand!" he shouted.

"But I can explain," said Paget anxiously.

"Will you take your hand off my arm?" cried the other.

"If you'll only listen to reason," said the girl.

Without a word the man drew his whistle. Paget knew that, were it blown, in a minute or two a dozen constables would be running toward them, and what explanations could be made would be given in a police station or, worse, in a police court. Paget was a man who thought and acted quickly. Before the whistle could be lifted to its owner's lips it was snatched from him with such force that the chain attaching it to his coat was broken. Almost with the same action it was flung

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"'You are making a mistake,' she informed him easily"

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over the high railings into the gardens of the square. A moment later the officer, floored by a wrestler's trick, fell heavily to the ground; his helmet was rammed with all his opponent's strength over his head and he groped blindly about the gutter.

When he had recovered himself sufficiently to extricate his head from the helmet, the man and girl were well on their way, running toward Marchmont Street.

"I hope you can keep this up for a bit," whispered Paget, gripping the girl's arm. "If we can only get around some convenient corner it will be all right."

"I can do it," she answered cheerfully.

He checked her speed a few yards from the corner. "There may be another constable there," he told her. "If he sees us running he may arrest us as suspicious characters."

There was, indeed, a policeman standing chaffing a cabman, but he did not even glance at the two. In the distance the thud of the rubber-shod constable was heard.

"I can hear him," whispered the girl.

Paget looked down at her doubtfully. He dreaded hysterics. He felt that they were in a nasty predicament from which they could only

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have a chance to escape if she kept her nerve. John Paget under magisterial cross-examination would not cut a very good figure. Incidentally, he knew that assaulting a police officer in the execution of his duty was a serious offence. Nina Lloyd smiled with great calmness, thereby relieving him immeasurably.

"Your African adventures have given me great confidence in you. How are you going to rescue me?"

"By keeping cheerful and trusting to luck," he said. "That's the only way."

They were walking quickly, afraid to run lest the attention of the constable talking to the cabman should be drawn to them. Paget had noticed that he was tall and slim and promised speed. A few yards brought them to a meeting of the ways. One road kept on under glaring street lamps, while the other, crescent-shaped, offered greater security. Into this sheltered road they turned and commenced again to run. Halfway along the crescent a road ran to the left. To continue the crescent road would only mean that they would again reach the main street.

"We'd better try this," suggested the girl.

Before they could slacken their speed they had passed a young man and a girl talking in the

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shadow of an alleyway. The young man appeared to be much interested.

"What's up?" he cried good-naturedly. "Coppers after yer?"

"A fire," said Paget with commendable promptness, "a terrific blaze!"

"Where?" the young man instantly demanded.

"At Maple's!" Miss Lloyd cried, perceiving his hesitancy and naming the great furniture store hard by.

"I work there," said the young man, with some show of excitement. "Come on!" he cried to his companion. They disappeared down a flight of stone steps to the right.

"I can hear the men coming!" said Nina, grasping Paget's arm. "We'd better not follow that man and girl."

He looked quickly about him and drew her down another of the quiet roads of Bloomsbury. A hundred yards showed that it was a *cul de sac*. Under the light at its other end the heavy form of the assaulted constable flashed past. He had seen the fire-seeking couple and was gaining on them.

"We must get out of this," declared Paget, "before he finds he has drawn a blank."

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"But the other policeman," she objected. "He knows about us now."

"But he didn't look at us," said Paget. "I don't see anything for us but to retrace our steps. He may not even have been warned. The other chap will certainly be back in a minute or so."

They retraced their steps, and glancing cautiously round the corner found that the tall, slim officer had been reinforced by another. Rapidly Paget took off the overcoat he was wearing and threw it over the railings into the gardens of Burton Crescent, where, with a prayer of gratitude for mercies unexpected, the gardener found it next morning.

"Give me your cloak," he said. "I won't throw it away, but I'll put it over my arm. For all we know, your policeman may have left descriptions of our clothes." Then he took her arm. "I'm sorry," he said, "but this is the only way I can think of just now."

The constables looked sharply at the pair as they passed. They saw merely a young man who was slightly the worse for drink. He was neither incapable nor disorderly, so they had no claim upon him. The slim constable had recently been married, and seeing instantly that Miss Lloyd

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was a lady and therefore not the person vividly described by the irate officer, grew virtuously bitter at the way some men treated their wives.

His companion, a benedick of twenty years, had long since ceased this manner of thought and interrupted him impatiently with:

"After they got him down and kicked him in the nose, what did they do?"

Paget, not out of earshot, chuckled.

"We are supposed to have broken his nose," he laughed. "We—you are included, too. He'll probably swear that you held him down while I did it."

"I shan't back out of it," she said more seriously.

"I think we're all right now," he answered. "I don't know how to go home from here, but we're bound to meet a hansom soon."

At this moment the first constable returned from his false trail and came upon the two brother officers.

"Did you see them?" he gasped.

"No—only a drunk feller and a girl."

The elder policeman stamped his foot with rage.

"Why didn't you hold them?" he cried. "Ten to one it's them. The pair I chased said they

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were talking to them not ten seconds before I came up. Hurry up! Hurry up!"

The slim officer set off in pursuit. He had seen which way the twain had gone. So it was that when the girl commenced to thank her companion for his help, she looked back at the rapid footsteps and beheld the officer racing toward her. Paget saw it an instant later.

"Run on as hard as you can," he said, "and wait for me around the first corner." He almost pushed her in his anxiety. "Run, run!" he repeated.

As the pursuing constable saw a fleeting figure he redoubled his efforts. When, therefore, he encountered Paget's foot thrust suddenly forward from the shelter of a doorway, he fell to the ground with a thud and remained motionless. For a moment his assailant feared that his silence might be that of death; but it was no time for first aid to the injured; and he sprinted after the girl, who was waiting for him.

"I couldn't go any further," she gasped; "I lost a slipper."

"Never mind," he said cheerily, "there's always some way out of it."

But he looked very anxious as he took his bearings.

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It was not yet time for the theatre hansoms to be returning. Between ten and eleven Bloomsbury is very quiet. A drizzling rain was falling and few people were in the streets. For a moment the idea of entering a house came to his mind, but there were sounds of men talking excitedly together, which made him determined to act quickly. Before him were the iron railings of Bloomsbury Square. Inside, tall horse chestnuts, their leaves newly unfolded, revealed through their yet uncovered lower limbs dense shrubberies beyond through which no police lantern could pierce.

"Here's our only hope," he said. "If I get you onto the top of the railings jump as far as you can. I'll follow."

The girl jumped as she was bid and landed in a bed of yellow calceolarias. Paget, following, was less fortunate and was embraced by thorny bushes, but they were barely sheltered when the two assaulted officers swung round the corner.

"Will they shoot?" demanded the girl. She had read of New York policemen shooting and was now thoroughly frightened.

"They haven't got revolvers," he whispered. "I'm glad of it. Paternal government won't allow it. Don't be frightened. They'll never

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suspect us. Not many girls could have got over as neatly as you." He looked at her with a very genuine admiration. "I prophesy that you will go down in police records as one of the boldest and most relentless criminals of modern times."

"I shudder to think where I should be if it had not been for you," she said gratefully. "What are we to do now?"

"Walk across this garden, climb the railings —and home."

"I dread that climbing," she said.

But it was not so difficult this time. A friendly ladder found in the gardener's shed eased the operation, and they descended into a street which seemed to be unpatrolled by the police. There were still no hansoms in sight, an unusual piece of ill luck, since these gondolas of the London streets are ordinarily ubiquitous.

The girl, feeling that her tribulations were over, began to thank him.

"Not till we're out of the wood," he said a little gravely.

"I thought we were," she said. "This is the terrace of houses our boarding-house is in, isn't it?"

"I don't know," he said. "To tell you the truth, I never asked Mrs. Dean for the address.

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I was driving by and the house seemed attractive. The only way for me to recognise it is by a prodigiously tall ladder leaning against the rear of the end house."

She pointed to something seen indistinctly in the misty night, and clapped her hands.

"Hurrah!" she cried. "There's your ladder, Mr. Paget! Yes, that's the end house, and we live thirty-four houses along, or rather, seventeen, for the houses are numbered alternately. That lamp is outside——"

"What is it?" he demanded, as she broke off abruptly.

"Look!" she said. "Are those policemen outside our house?"

He pulled her back into the shadows and peered anxiously.

"You're right," he announced gravely. "There seem to be a number. Of course they may not be after us. London isn't the biggest city of the world without having all sorts of police affairs every night. The odds are they are after someone else."

"And if they're not——?" she asked.

"They thirst for our blood," he answered.

There was a note of anxiety in her voice which he had not heard before when she said:

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"Mr. Paget, things of this sort—accidents and adventures, I mean—are sometimes what we call 'squared' on the other side. Can't we square this?"

He shook his head.

"I doubt it," he said. "The London policeman hasn't any such chances as the New York or Chicago men have. Take it all round, they won't accept bribes. There is no political pull here in police matters."

"If we are caught, what will be done? Please tell me truthfully. It's rather serious, isn't it?"

"Oh, not very," he said easily. "Happens every day somewhere or other."

"Not what we've been doing," she said.

"But you haven't been doing anything," he returned smiling.

"Assaulting the police is very serious," she declared. "We assaulted two."

"You didn't," he corrected. "I assaulted two of them. If caught, which is unlikely, I may get fined forty shillings and costs or in default ten days' imprisonment. It is comforting to think that I have the necessary sum saved up."

"Do you think I should let you take the blame when it was my fault?" she said indignantly.

"I hope you would," he said. "It wouldn't

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mean much for a man. There would be the usual little magisterial lecture about disgracing parents and that sort of thing. Perhaps a few lines in the papers and then oblivion. I know," he added with a smile. "I was run in one boat-race night for singing in public places. I was dismissed with a caution. Now with you it would be different. I can see it in all the papers: 'Beautiful American Girl Assaults Police.' You'd never get over it. A man has the inalienable right to play the fool by night, but a woman is judged differently."

"Yes, I know," she replied. "It's horrible to think about, but what are we to do?" she cried despairingly.

"It's quiet on this doorstep," he said, "and policeless so far as I can see. We'd better wait a bit and see when those men are going to move."

There was silence for a few moments. Suddenly she laid her hand on his arm and cried: "I've a splendid idea! A certain escape, and all owing to my mania for ventilation!"

"You are going too fast for me," he said.

"At the top of the house," she went on breathlessly, "there is a big room where trunks are stored. I have two big ones there that won't go in the bedroom. I went up this morning to

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get a dress out." She looked down upon the pretty frock that could never be worn again. "It was so stuffy that I pried open the skylight and forgot to shut it. The room is rarely used and probably the light is open still."

"The ladder!" he exclaimed. "It's an inspiration!"

Towering aloft into the darkness, the climb up the side of the somber old house of five stories would have daunted most girls. Nina Lloyd treated it with profound unconcern. It was the way of salvation.

"I wish you would go first," she said. "I don't mind the climbing, but I may be a little nervous about getting from the ladder to the roof."

When the roof was gained it was not easy work climbing the brick parapets which divided the houses. Some householders had pots of flowers, which met disaster at the hands of the invaders, and one small boy wept bitterly next day to find that the rabbits he kept in a hutch had got loose and three of them had come to a violent end.

They counted seventeen houses, and after a while found the skylight still open. The girl professed to remember that the drop to the floor was not very great, and Paget essayed to lower

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himself down. This was safely accomplished, and when the girl swung herself down he was able to stand upon a chair and save her the jar the drop had caused him.

He lit a match, and finding a gas jet looked about him curiously.

The girl made a quick exclamation of dismay.

"This isn't the house at all!" she cried.

It was certainly no room for the storage of baggage. Plainly it was a child's playroom, for grouped about in picturesque untidiness were toys of all descriptions.

The girl threw herself into a low rocking chair and laughed softly.

"Mr. Paget," she said, "I am resigned to anything. The ladder was my inspiration. It's your turn for an inspiration now."

He looked at the skylight.

"I prefer aspiration," he replied, "but we can't possibly climb out. It isn't late enough to be taken for burglars." He looked at his watch. "Only half-past eleven. We must descend."

The stairs were well carpeted, and two flights were safely negotiated when sounds of voices fell on the silence.

The stairs at this point were brilliantly illuminated, and before retreat could be made a door

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opened and an elderly man came upon them. He was nonplussed for the moment.

"Well!" he said. "And what's the meaning of this?"

Paget's quick eye had discerned the stethoscope protruding slightly from his pocket.

"The fact is, Doctor," he exclaimed ingenuously, "we need your professional advice! I dropped in to see you."

"What were you doing up there?" He pointed to the stairway.

"You were not there, so we came to find you." Paget was aware that this story went haltingly, but his face gave no evidence of it. "I have a three-inch cut on my head." He turned to the light and for the first time the girl saw that his collar at the back was blood-stained. "By the way," he demanded, "how many stitches go to the inch?"

"That is a matter for the police surgeon," replied the old man. "I am merely a consulting physician."

The girl started at the ominous word "police," and the doctor gazed at her keenly.

"You don't like the word 'police,' then?" he demanded.

"I loathe it," she said.

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"From a small child she has always dreaded it," said her companion promptly. "I could never understand it."

"Well, sir," cried the old doctor, "we shall see whether you share the same dread!" He turned to the girl and looked at her for a moment. "Your friend here," he said, indicating Paget, "is plainly a criminal. That you should be one, too, is probably not your fault." He sighed. "The victim, I judge, of a bad heredity. Don't attempt to escape, either of you."

"We shouldn't dream of it," Paget assured him. "I need a tonic badly. Even consulting physicians won't deny me that."

The old man opened the door of the room from which he had come.

"Father," he called, "I should like your advice!"

"Good heavens!" whispered Paget. "What a centenarian he must be!"

"Please don't say anything more," whispered the girl softly. "I have such a desire to cry or laugh—I don't know which—that I'm afraid it's hysteria."

The doctor turned to them.

"Come in here," he said severely.

They followed him into what was obviously his

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consulting-room. There were strange instruments under glass cases and many dismal-looking books. All these the girl observed quickly; but her eye rested for a longer time on an unusually tall, thin, ascetic young man with a large aquiline nose and marked chin who was dressed as an Anglican priest. He looked at her with a cold, sexless gaze, and then at her companion with more interest. His look changed to one of such blank consternation that the girl turned to Paget, who was in his turn staring at this tall cleric with amazement.

And, indeed, to see his only brother in such curious circumstances was more than Lord St. Vian's eldest son could understand. Absolutely disinclined for the sports and pleasures of the normal boy, and debarred by reason of ill health from the public school life of the Englishman of his class, Cyril Trevenose had grown up apart from his brother and with even less sympathy for his pursuits than had Viscount Mountcastle for what he termed the other's ecclesiastical vagaries. At Keble—for Cyril rebelled against the tradition which sent all the Trevenoses to Christ Church—he had developed into a Ritualist of the extremest sort. The Order of the Blessed Meditation which he had founded was made up

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of men of family and learning who had pledged themselves to celibacy. With what fortune he had inherited from his mother, Father Trevenose had endowed the Order and had of late been asking for more from his father to increase the endowment. For three years the brothers had not met, and a certain feeling of antagonism had grown up between them on account of this repeated request for large sums from the Earl of St. Vian.

"Father," said the old doctor with what neither Paget nor the girl failed to notice was extreme respect, "I have just captured these housebreakers. But I confess that they puzzle me."

"Housebreakers!" repeated Trevenose in horror. His pride of race was deep seated, and to think that the man who would succeed to the family title as the seventeenth earl was caught in anything dishonourable came as a profound shock. "Impossible!"

"Father," said Paget quickly, "may I speak with you privately for a few moments?" He turned to the old man. "You don't mind, Doctor?"

The doctor looked inquiringly at the churchman.

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"You really needn't be alarmed," said Paget. "I'm the desperate one. The lady is perfectly harmless."

"I shall be glad if you will leave me with this gentleman," said Trevenose.

Nina Lloyd, at a loss to understand what was to be the outcome of this adventure, followed the old man docilely into an adjoining room, which was fitted up as a chemical laboratory. Here, while they waited, she was regaled with an account of the fascinations of morbid pathology.

When they were alone Paget turned to his brother.

"Your doctor friend," he said, "is making a mistake which is perfectly excusable, but all the same a mistake. This lady narrowly escaped being arrested by a fool of a policeman because she lost her way and answered him sharply. She is a lady and has done nothing wrong."

"Do ladies habitually enter strange houses by night?" asked the other.

"Of course not," snapped his brother. "That's where the mistake was made. We thought this was the boarding-house where she and her aunt live, and we came through the wrong roof. On my honour, Cyril, she is no more a burglar than I am."

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"What do you want me to do?" demanded the priest. His manner was not cordial.

"Guarantee us to the old chap who owns this house so that he will let us out without asking for police aid."

"It is not Dr. Brundage's house," said Trevenose; "it belongs to the Order."

"The Order?" said Paget incredulously. "What does the Order want with a big room filled with all sorts of toys?"

"This is our home for crippled children. Dr. Brundage is the medical superintendent."

Paget looked at him with interest. "By Jove, Cyril," he exclaimed, "I'd no idea you went in for that sort of thing! I thought you had ten services a day and delighted the hearts of vinegary virgins thereby."

"Did you ever try to find out?" demanded the priest.

"I'm afraid I didn't," Paget confessed. "How many children are there?"

"Twenty," said the other. "We have accommodation for no more." He sighed. "It has been my aim to establish a convalescent home at Boscombe, but we have not been able to do so."

"Money?" Paget asked. "Hard up?"

"That is the reason," admitted Trevenose.

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"Tell me the truth, Cyril," said his brother. "That money you were always worrying the governor about, was it for this Boscombe House?"

"We need such a place and I asked my father. He refused. I may be unjust, but I have always felt that you influenced him against me."

"I did," said Paget. "I thought you were quite different people. I'm sorry. Do you know, Cyril," he continued with a smile, "perhaps you are not such a bad chap after all. Will you vouch to Brundage for us and let us escape?"

"Assuredly," said Trevenose, "I can take your word that you have done nothing wrong."

Paget fidgeted uneasily for a moment.

"Look here, my dear chap," he said at length, "perhaps we are not so innocent after all. Receive this confidence under the seal of confession."

The priest listened attentively to the story of the night's adventures.

"It is unfortunate," he said. "But I don't think a Trevenose could have done differently." He reflected a moment. "But how are you to get the young lady home?"

"We'll drive by the boarding-house in a hansom," said Paget, "and if all's clear we'll go in. If not, well, we'll seek more adventures. And, by the way, Cyril," he said with elaborate uncon-

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cern, "Miss Lloyd knows me only as John Paget, so don't introduce me to Brundage."

"I like that part of the story least of all," said his brother. "Surely——"

"Father has consented, Cyril. The fact is Milly and I aren't engaged any longer. She fell in love with Ganton, of the D. C. L. I., while I was in India. You remember Ganton, who won the Grand National on Grey Wolf last year?"

"That is hardly a good way to bring him to my mind," observed the other.

"Well, the long and short of it is that they're to be married. I'm glad. Don't think my smiling face covers an aching heart. I was never fitter, but I had an odd fancy, as you'll think it, to be plain John Paget for a time; and if I get captured to-night no one will be any the wiser. My dear chap, don't look so grieved. I'm not sowing wild oats. I shall probably soon tire of this life, but I am more anxious about getting this girl home than anything else. If you've a man who can whistle for a hansom I'd be obliged."

"I've never been able to understand you," said Trevenose. "You always do surprising things that have a touch of the irrational in them." He sighed again.

"Don't sigh," said Paget. "Few things de-

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press me more. By the way," he continued, "are you still keen on this convalescent home scheme?"

"It fills my mind," answered the other.

"Build it, then," said Paget. "Build it as big as you want and it will be paid for. Now you can't say I bribed you to let me go."

Father Cyril took his brother's outstretched hand. Not for many years had they felt so kindly to one another.

Dr. Brundage asked for no explanation when Father Trevenose told him to accompany Miss Lloyd and Paget to the door. The Father was an arbitrary man and his strong personality had dominated the old doctor to a remarkable degree.

"But why take a hansom when we are only a few houses away?" demanded Nina, when in response to the whistle a cab dashed up.

"Because, to our shame," he answered, "this isn't the terrace where we live. The ladder we climbed isn't our ladder. The skylight you opened is half a mile away. Local topography isn't our strong point."

There were no policemen in sight when the cab reached the boarding-house.

"I wonder what my aunt will think of me?" said the girl as Paget turned up the gas in the hall and she beheld her ruined raiment. "Or of

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you if she sees you? Your hand is bleeding, and I forgot about your head entirely. How selfish of me!" She bent over him and almost shrieked. "Why, it's a horrible cut! I thought you were joking when you told Dr. Brundage."

"It doesn't hurt a bit," he said. "I did it in the square garden, on the edge of a hoe. In fact, I landed that way."

"But what will you do?" she cried.

"Go out and find a doctor." He smiled and held out his hand. "You ought to run off to bed and sleep all day to-morrow."

"I shall," she yawned. "I feel bruised all over. But, Mr. Paget," she added very seriously, "I shall never feel grateful enough to you for what you did to-night. I'm not able to tell you how grateful I am."

There were men—she had known *some*—who would have seized upon the intimacy which the events of the night had forced upon them to enforce by some subtle suggestion a continuance of it. It was with a certain dread that she held out her hand and looked into his face. She saw admiration and friendliness and a certain hope that their acquaintance might progress, but nothing of the boldness with which she half feared to be met.

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"I've enjoyed it immensely," he said, smiling. "I feel that I'm cut out for a reckless criminal; and one wouldn't want a pluckier companion. *Dormez bien!*"

She shut the door after him and then went slowly to her room. Miss Scott always retired early and usually left her niece reading in her own room, which was *en suite*. She was awakened from a pleasing slumber by the turning up of the gas.

"My child," she said agitatedly when her keen eyes fell upon the ruined dress, "my poor child, what has happened?"

The girl sat on the edge of the bed and smiled at her.

"Nothing serious," she answered. "You remember Mr. Paget, whose African adventures remind one of Munchausen up-to-date?"

"Yes, yes!" cried the other impatiently.

"He and I have been out together, and I wronged him by not being so credulous as you. Auntie, he's a most extraordinary young man, and I believe every word of what he said at dinner last night."

"I must know everything," said Miss Scott excitedly.

"Not to-night," said the girl. "I'm too limp

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and bruised. Rouse thee, mine aunt, and get witch hazel and cold cream and sticking plaster and liniments."

She thrust out a little foot covered equally with silk hose and Bloomsbury mud.

"What would my father think if he knew that one slipper is treasured at Scotland Yard and the other will be found by a gardener in a square garden?"

Miss Scott, with hands that trembled, poured out some sal volatile.

"Take this at once!" she cried. "My dear, it must have been something very serious. I insist upon knowing."

Nina smiled and nodded her head.

"Not to-night. But it wasn't serious."

Suddenly she put her hand to her bosom and drew out a letter. She looked at it curiously as though it were something she was seeing for the first time. "This is the most serious part of the whole thing," she said slowly. "This is the letter I went out to post. I wonder," she muttered, "if——"

"If what?" demanded her aunt, who was convinced that something out of the way was happening, something whose importance she could not fathom.

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"I was wondering if fate ever ordained things," said the girl more brightly. "I think we ordain things ourselves and blame Fate anyhow."

She tore the letter into very tiny pieces and then went to the window, limping as she went, and threw them out slowly, a few pieces here and there.

"It would take more than Sherlock Holmes to put that together again. All the king's horses and all the king's men couldn't," she laughed.

"My child," said the grey-haired aunt profoundly, "I don't know what you are talking about, but it sounds as though you had a secret."

"Dear lady," she answered laughingly, "could I have lived three and twenty years in this wicked world, New Orleans, my convent, New York, Paris and London, without having at least one teeny secret all to myself?"

Miss Scott took the torn stockings off carefully and bathed the aching feet with an affection that the girl's mother had never shown her. She was silent for some minutes.

"Ah," she sighed, "if you were only happy and married!"

"Happy and married!" echoed the girl. "It's a contradiction in terms. I have seen very little

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married happiness, I can assure you. You, for instance, are much happier than my mother. I think I shall take up some hobby like yours and spend my remaining days in libraries."

"But I was the ugly duckling of the family," said the elder woman wistfully. "If I had been tall and slim and beautiful like you I don't suppose I should have wanted to become an authority on ecclesiastical vestments and old lace." She assumed for the first time within her niece's recollection a tone that was almost disrespectful.

"Oh, auntie, treason!" said the girl reproachfully. "What would you have done if you hadn't taken them up?"

"If I had been made tall and straight like your mother or you, I should have dreamed other dreams."

The poor lady sighed again. Romance had never tarried with her. She looked at Nina almost shyly.

"Don't you dream dreams, dear?"

"Nightmares, only nightmares," was her impatient answer. She stooped suddenly and put her arms about her aunt's neck. "You belong to a kinder age," she added affectionately, "when people met together and read Dickens and thought Ruskin was the only authority on art,

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and there wasn't any higher criticism, and nobody tumbled idols from pedestals, and wives honoured and obeyed their lords, and no Sunday evening was complete that didn't end up with badly sung hymns chanted in mournful unison by devout folk without sense of rhythm."

"They were happy days, after all," said Miss Scott stoutly. She had been brought up in a typical New England home and had seen with much trepidation her beautiful sister, Nina's mother, marry one of the Louisiana Lloyds and leave the outer edge of the Brahmanical society of Boston for the gayer, more fascinating life of New Orleans.

"But I cannot laugh with Dickens," cried the girl. "Ruskin talks as the waters come down at Lodore; I have made mud pies of the clay feet of idols, and hymn tunes send me to sleep."

Miss Scott looked grave. She rose to her feet slowly and made her way to a medicine chest, from which she took a clinical thermometer.

"I am going to take," she said, "what you as a child used to call your 'temperament.' You are feverish."

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## CHAPTER FOUR

### A LUNCHEON AT THE SAVOY

PAGET passed a wretched night. The stitches in his hand caused him a great deal of irritation, and he was bruised, literally, from head to foot. When in the early morning he dropped off to sleep for a time, he slumbered fitfully, only to be awakened by the opening of his door and the voice of Myers.

"The breakfast is all over," said he, "and Mrs. Dean asked me to come and see what was the matter."

The words were scarcely out of his mouth when he caught sight of the chair whereon Paget's clothes, torn, muddy and disreputable looking, were lying in disarray. He gave vent to his surprise in a prolonged whistle.

"Old man, you must have had a phosphorescent time, last night!"

"I did," answered Paget, shortly. "What time is it?"

"Nine fifty-three," said the other, consulting a large gold watch.



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"I overslept," said Paget, drowsily.

"I always do after being out on the tiles," said Myers reassuringly. "I suppose you don't want any breakfast? I never do."

"Coffee and toast is all I need. Will you ask that waiter fellow to bring them up, please?"

While Paget was sipping some of that concoction, which in boarding-houses the world over masquerades under the sacred name of coffee, Myers went to the dressing-table and examined Paget's ring and watch with care. Had he known aught of heraldry, he might have been surprised to see the St. Vian coat of arms on Mr. Paget's signet; but it impressed him merely with the idea that the new boarder was "class."

"She wasn't down to breakfast," he said presently, rather dejectedly.

There was no doubt as to whom "she" was. Paget listened eagerly while the other went on with:

"Miss Scott says she caught a chill at the Elgar concert at Queen's Hall." A moment later he added: "Old Danby's gone, and what's more, he sent me what he owed me. I don't understand it. When he wasn't at dinner last night, I thought Mrs. Dean had just given him the key of the street."

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For the moment Paget lost interest in the doings of Mr. Danby.

"Did you hear if it was anything serious with Miss Lloyd?" he asked.

"A bad cold was all Miss Scott would tell me. I don't seem able to get along with that woman, somehow." Myers shook his head at her lack of taste, and again his little, restless, close-set, dark eyes wandered to the torn clothes. "Looks as if you had been fighting the police and got the worst of it."

"That's precisely what happened," said Paget a little wearily.

"Got chucked out of a music hall, or anything like that?" demanded the other. It was Myers's idea of a rollicking life to imbibe sufficient alcoholic stimulant to make him offensive. While in this state he had been ejected from places of public resort.

"Out of several," returned Paget. "The suffragettes threw me out of St. Martin's Town Hall and—would you like any more details?"

"There's one thing about me," replied Myers with dignity, "that you may have noticed. I can always tell when I'm not wanted."

"I fear I'm not a very close observer," said Paget. "I hadn't noticed it."

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Myers made for the door angrily, but paused before going out.

"Don't forget that I'm invited to sit at her table to-night."

"Her table?" queried Paget. "Whose table?"

"Miss Lloyd's," said Myers in triumph.

For an hour after Myers had gone, Paget lay on his bed reflecting on the injustice which had banished him from the little table where he might sit with his back to the light and Miss Binns. Then, presently, with some difficulty, he struggled into his clothes, made his way downstairs, and when Adolf had called a hansom, he said to the cabman:

"Drive me to a florist!"

At the florist's he purchased a great number of beautiful William Allen Richardson roses and ordered that they should be sent to Miss Lloyd. At first, he thought of attaching his card to them and of making mention, in some way, only to be understood by the girl, of the adventures of the night before. But, finally, he decided against this, and they went to her with no indication of the sender.

From the florist's, a large glass-roofed store where everything was beautiful, he took his way to an institution which rarely failed to sadden

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him—a Turkish Bath. In this gallery of the grotesque, this collection of gruesome caricatures of the human form divine, he spent several hours, and returned to his boarding-house eased and refreshed in time to dress for dinner.

When the gong rang he waited a few minutes and then slowly came to the large dining-room. Myers, with a red gardenia in his coat, was casting uneasy glances at the door. All the other guests were in their places. Between Miss Binns and the lady who lived on art, Paget sat down gloomily. Miss Binns acknowledged his bow heavily; the artistic lady was more affable.

"We are quite a small party to-night," she observed. "Mr. Danby has gone, Miss Smith and her uncle left for Brighton on the three-thirty, and Miss Scott and Miss Lloyd cross the channel to-night." She looked at the clock. "They should reach Ostend in an hour's time. I hope they have a good passage."

Paget was dumbfounded. Nevertheless he tried to appear disinterested. His efforts in that direction were aided by his keen sense of humour. For, though annoyed as he unquestionably was by this news, there was something inordinately funny in the crestfallen attitude of Myers, the solitary diner, who had found, as he had been

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promised, a vacant chair. Had poesy been the little man's gift, another ode would have been added to the many which deal with the falsity of women. Only he and the waiter, Adolf, knew of the magnum of champagne that was to have come in with the fish.

Another more or less sleepless night was passed by Paget. Carefully reviewing over and over again this new state of affairs, he felt that Miss James, more than any other in the house, must know definitely Miss Lloyd's destination, and he was determined to obtain it. And fortune favoured him the next morning, for as he was coming out of a Strand book-shop, he beheld little Miss James making for an A. B. C. restaurant. She looked so forlorn, so unimportant among the hurrying multitude in the world's busiest thoroughfare that, in any event, he would have stopped her.

"You haven't had luncheon yet?" he asked.

"I am about to have it," she replied meekly.

"Be charitable, Miss James, and have it with me," he said. "The Savoy is only across the street and it is warm enough to have a table on the balcony—you will? That's splendid!"

Fluttering with excitement, Miss James crossed the great court-yard of the famous hostelry for

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the first time and tasted an exquisite luncheon. Poor lady! She had never been even passably good-looking and was near to fifty. Now Paget, lacking an inch of six feet, was what, for want of a better term, is called well set up; he had an indefinable charm of manner and voice, which was not often met with in Mrs. Dean's establishment; and no wonder, then, that Miss James, in recalling the incidents of that wonderful luncheon with Paget sitting opposite to her, told herself that never was there a more attentive listener to her views.

It wanted, therefore, but little effort for the crafty listener to lead her, after a time, to the subject of old lace. Here, with the candour of one great soul to another, she admitted that Miss Lloyd's aunt, Miss Scott, was the greatest authority she knew upon such subjects.

"Why," declared she with *empressement*, "Miss Scott is writing articles for a great American paper, the *Ladies' Home Magazine*, which will be brought out later in book form."

"Has she gone back to America?" Paget asked.

"Not yet," said the other. "She has gone abroad somewhere." Miss James smote her brow with impatience. "Dear me, I've forgotten the

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name. It doesn't matter, but it's some place on the Continent either in Belgium or Brittany—I forget which—where there is a museum of old lace."

"Does Mrs. Dean know?" Paget asked, stemming a disposition on the lady's part again to converse on art.

"No. Quite mysterious, isn't it? Mrs. Dean asked where letters were to be forwarded, and Miss Scott said there would be none."

The indifference of Miss James to the country visited was proving exasperating to the impatient man. He summoned a waiter and whispered an order to him.

"Oh, Mr. Paget!" sighed Miss James, as the servant went away quickly. "If Miss Binns could only be here!" And her host took it as the sincerest compliment that could be paid to Savoy cuisine and his choice.

In a few moments the waiter returned and placed a Baedeker in Paget's hands. Miss James could not resist the temptation to glance at the title.

"Belgium!" she cried; then she smiled at him meaningly. "Oh, Mr. Paget!"

"Old lace," he returned, also smiling, "has

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always fascinated me. I intend to take up the subject thoroughly."

"Well, I must say," declared Miss James with apparent irrelevance, "she is certainly one of the most beautiful girls I have ever seen. Oh, how stupid of me! Now I remember—it's Bruges—they've gone to Bruges! You'll give my love to them both, won't you, Mr. Paget?"

Miss James returned to her Fleet Street office in a taxicab accompanied by a large box of chocolates. To Paget, plentifully supplied with money, the cost of the luncheon was nothing. But to the woman, faded, not happy, conscious of the failure of her ambitions, this was an occasion which she looked back upon with feelings that the man could never have understood.

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## CHAPTER FIVE

### THE CARROUSEL

From his earliest manhood Viscount Mountcastle had been very much in society. As an officer of the Ninth Hussars, as the heir to an ancient and very wealthy earldom, he had been *persona grata* wherever he had been stationed. But the popularity, as his father had hinted, did not arise wholly from these advantages. Men liked him because he played polo well and rode to hounds as a Trevenose should; women liked him because he danced well, never bored them and was an adept at the species of flirtation which smooths the paths of life. That he had never been really in love with any one woman was the probable reason he had never taken himself seriously. And this failure to do so accounted for the fact that he had never become a bore. He had been fond of Lady Mildred Heronhurst in a cousinly and altogether placid manner; but the deeper impulses of his nature had never been stirred. He had always been honestly fond of the society of a pretty girl. He had found that the statement uttered and published for centuries by plain wo-



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men that their better-favoured sisters were less intelligent was grossly wrong. Nina Lloyd was one of the many proofs of this.

Faithful to the promise to write an account of his adventures to Lord St. Vian, he wrote a very long letter. It seemed almost incredible as he dated it to think that he had been away from his home but one week. Here he was in Bruges and hoping to renew his acquaintance with a girl of whom, seven days ago, he had never heard. When he had read over what he had written, he was conscious that it was not the entirely true account of his wanderings which he had purposed to send when he had left the West Country. He spoke enthusiastically of Mr. Danby and his fitness to be the librarian, but concerning Nina Lloyd there was not a word. Lord St. Vian was so frankly cynical that he would never understand that his son was not in love with the heroine of his adventures; and Paget, being unused to the analysis of the sources of his thoughts and actions, and lacking a psychological acumen in dealing with women, had no words to express exactly his state of feeling in the matter. But he knew that the earl would look for some explanation of Bruges as a choice of locality.

"I find," he wrote, "that there is an English

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Sports Club here where one may get golf and tennis. It's a short course, but at Knocke, a few miles away, there is as sporting an eighteen-hole course as one may need. I wish you would have my golf and tennis things sent out here to John Paget at above address."

Paget was satisfied that if this might not be accepted as a reason it would do admirably as an excuse.

. . . .

All travellers seem to agree that, with the possible exception of Segovia, in Spain, Bruges bears more than any other European city the impress of mediæval times. Very wisely the city authorities have decreed that no new buildings will be allowed erection which do not conform to the general architectural style of the city. The opportunity, therefore, of the bizarre or even the modern to break up the quiet charm of the town is not allowed; and the general result is one of peace and quiet and antiquity.

It was Paget's first visit to the capital of West Flanders; and he left his hotel not ashamed to be a student of his red guide, and made his way to the church of Notre Dame, whose tall tower, higher than the famous belfry itself, dominates the city.

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Adjoining the choir on the east he came upon the Grunthuus Museum and entered, not without a suspicion of nervousness foreign to his nature. The first person his eye fell upon was Miss Scott, who was sketching a very rare piece of Brussels point lace.

Her reception of him was not cordial enough to be reassuring.

"What on earth are you doing here?" she demanded.

"I purpose writing a volume on the influence of lace on women's morals," he returned gravely. "I have decided views on the subject."

"What an extraordinary young man!" she muttered.

"Where is Miss Lloyd, by the way?" he asked, going straight to the point.

"My niece is at the *Couvent des Dames Anglaises*," returned the other. "She was at school there, and is staying with the sisters for a time. I am at a *pension*."

"You must miss her awfully?"

"Oh, yes; of course I do! Nina is a strange girl, but I have no cause for complaint, for she is charitable enough for some three months of each year to desert her luxurious home to travel with her aunt in second-class boarding-houses.

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She has already spent ten weeks away from her home."

"Then she'll be going back soon?" he hazarded.

"In a fortnight, I'm sorry to say."

"Where will she go?"

"Newport or Lenox," answered the aunt. "Or possibly, to Colonel Lloyd's place in the Thousand Islands." She turned on him quickly. "Have you been to America?"

"I am due there next month," he said. "My work takes me there."

Work for the Viscount Mountcastle in America! Paget smiled inwardly. True, he had many friends among Americans, but they were of the leisure class. Indeed, for that matter, he had once considered taking a polo team out, and had been urged on innumerable occasions to stay at Newport.

"I don't think I always believe what you say," ventured Miss Scott.

"I hope you don't," he replied, picturing her indignation if she could have read what was in his mind. "Attempts to believe in what people say lead to more unhappiness than anything I know. 'There is more faith in honest doubt, believe me, than in half the creeds.' Though to-

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morrow I am going to High Mass at the Chapel of the *Couvent des Dames Anglaises*."

"Why?" she asked.

"Oh, I am anxious to see the dome built by Pulinex, and the exquisite altar of rare Persian and Egyptian marbles which was executed at Rome."

This was too much like temporising with the Church of Rome for Miss Scott. She returned to her shell. Her manner was less cordial.

"I hope it will do you good," she said with a touch of satire.

Paget thought of the possibility of seeing this strange, beautiful girl who interested him so much.

"I am sure that it will," he answered.

He walked toward his hotel in no way depressed by Miss Scott's attitude. He was young, he was healthy, there were no monetary troubles which could disturb him, and his curiosity concerning the Renaissance Church he would visit on the morrow was growing apace.

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Nina Lloyd had not, as Miss Scott supposed, been making the convent a retreat. She had come to stay for a day or so with the sisters. In a mood which did not visit her very often, the

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girl preferred the calm, secluded air of the convent to anything else. She sometimes wondered, as she gazed at the pale, sweet profile of Sister Veronica, whether it would not make her happy to set aside all things secular and, habited as she, spend her days away from the world. Such moods, it must be confessed, did not last long; and she came back to her ordinary life with its dances, parties and mundane pleasures with a keener zest for the absence from them.

It was with something of curiosity that Paget on entering the Convent Chapel looked about him. A mural tablet near his seat was to the memory of an English girl of the Talbot family, who had died while there. About him were other English names, and he wondered why Nina Lloyd should have been sent to this far-off institution. He was not very well situated for viewing the congregation as a whole, but with some straining he managed during the whole service to assure himself that she was not there. He did not know that in an upper gallery screened from observation she was sitting with Sister Veronica, a saintly woman who had more influence upon her than any of the others.

Nina was looking idly through the *grille* when her eyes lighted on Paget, who was craning his

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neck as unostentatiously as possible to see if by any chance she had come in late and might, after all, be sitting in the rear.

A little fleeting smile that had in it something of triumph and pleasure passed over her face. She would join her aunt on the morrow, she determined. Paget walked disappointedly back to his hotel by way of the ramparts. In the evening he strolled through the Grand Place, where the May Fair was in progress, and found that so far from being purely a place for the Belgians to disport themselves, all the English residents and American visitors were abroad, entering into the spirit of the thing with a verve that astonished him. He was tempted to shoot at swinging glass bottles, but missing five out of six shots, failed to gain the onlookers' respect. Presently on the Rue des Pierres, corner of the Place, he came upon the most prosperous *carrousel* he had ever seen. Horses and comfortable chariots alternated, all filled with visitors of the better class. That they could sit there, smiling like children, was more than strange, he thought.

His eye followed the gyrating pleasure-seekers with scorn, when he saw, seated in one of the red plush chariots, Nina Lloyd, chatting very vivaciously with a man whom he had never seen. His

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eyes followed the man jealously as time after time he swung past. He was small and slightly built, but dressed with care, and was not ill-looking. He was evidently a Belgian, not of the *bourgeoisie*, and that he admired the girl was obvious. What dislike Paget had felt for the unhappy Myers was swamped in his detestation of this stranger. He had been thinking of the girl as making a retreat with the white-habited sisters, and he found her, instead, laughing and riding with another man. There sprang up within him the unwarrantable feeling that he was being ill used.

But he had laughed too often at the sorry spectacle that jealous men make of themselves to fall into that mistake. It was the first time he had experienced jealousy, and he was inclined to think that he had often been too severe in his denunciation of it.

When the *carrousel* stopped, neither Nina nor her escort alighted. He swung himself into the saddle of a speckled quadruped behind the chariot and paid his ten centimes. In the brief spell of comparative quiet he could hear the lonely Belfry chiming the "Blue Danube" waltz. The man with Miss Lloyd seemed extraordinarily attentive, and the girl had never seemed so lively and so full of charm. It was impossible that he could disturb

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them until one or the other left their chariot. Presently he saw the girl wave her hand to Miss Scott, who was sitting patiently on a bench which ran round the tent. She evidently desired that her aunt should ride with her, for as it slowed down the man left her and she looked for Miss Scott.

Paget scrambled from the back of his steed and took the vacant chair.

"Miss Scott ought not to attempt this sort of thing," he said. "It would disturb her work."

"Where did you come from?" Nina demanded.

"From the spotted Rosinante behind," he answered cheerfully. "I rather like this," he added; "it beats Bloomsbury."

A happiness which was startling took possession of him.

"I meant, what brought you to Bruges?" she asked.

"I am writing 'The Effect of Women's Morals on the Lace Industry,'" he said. "It's to go into the next edition of the Encyclopedia Britannica."

"You have Raoul's seat," she said, smiling.

"He can have it," said Paget. "Let us to equitation. My steed has the funniest motion. I can recommend him."

"I prefer this—it's more comfortable."

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"Raoul can have the seat on my Pegasus."

She looked quickly at him; he seemed perfectly serious and made no effort to get up.

"He may not like it," she hazarded at last.

Paget raised his cap to Miss Scott, who bestowed upon him a look that was not wholly one of pleasure.

"There is always Miss Scott. She'll certainly enjoy his company more than mine. Be generous," he pleaded. "I saw Raoul spend at least a franc on rides for you, and heaven only knows what time he began! Let me have at least fifty centimes' worth."

Raoul passed Miss Scott without noticing her and took his seat beside two men. It was evident from his gesticulations that he was excited. He regarded Paget with unfriendly eyes, but threw smiles at Miss Lloyd with a liberality which the Englishman resented. Paget recalled his confidential attitude toward the girl with some distrust.

"You must know him very well," he observed at last.

"For years," she answered. "I know his sisters."

"What's his name?" he demanded.

"Raoul de Belleville. He lives with his father,

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Comte de Belleville, at the house with seven gables in the Rue Courte. He's a delightful boy."

Paget looked at him steadily.

"Yes?" he said with a faint note of interrogation in his voice.

"You'll like him," she said; "that is, if you speak French. He knows no other language except Flemish. He seems to interest you."

"What was he asking you about?" inquired Paget. "Every time he passed he seemed to be asking something."

"He was," admitted Nina, "but I didn't answer."

"Is it permitted to ask what it was?" he ventured.

"You're just as inquisitive as he," she retorted, "although not nearly so observant. He only wanted to know who gave me these flowers."

For the first time he noticed that she was wearing some William Allen Richardson roses.

"I couldn't possibly tell him," she continued, bending her delicate face to the blossoms to inhale their lingering scent. "You see, they came to me an hour before I left London, from whom, I cannot imagine. They've kept fresh in a perfectly wonderful manner."

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She looked at him innocently through long lashes.

"Wasn't it a stupid question to ask?"

"I have a certain sympathy with him," he answered softly, "although I hope you perceive that I am asking nothing of the kind."

"It was rather nice of you to send them," she said suddenly. "I've kept this for you."

She handed him a policeman's whistle with a piece of broken chain attached to it.

"I found it in the square garden when we were scrambling through it. I meant to have given it to you afterwards, but Pelion was piled on Ossa, whatever that may be, and I forgot." She laughed gently. "When the *douanier* found it in my trunk I felt horribly nervous. I felt international complications might happen."

He looked at it with interest. "Thanks," he said. "I shan't part with it readily."

"It's a dangerous gift," she said. "If it's found in your possession and you can't account for it there'll be trouble."

He put it in his pocket.

"It won't be discovered."

She put her hand to her head.

"I'm getting dizzy," she said. "Let's take my aunt to some of the other shows."

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Raoul de Belleville stepped forward to meet her as she alighted from the car and whispered in her ear, but not so softly that Paget could not hear.

"You are more adorable than ever, and more unkind, Nina."

The girl laughed lightly.

"You're a romantic child," she said, and then introduced the men.

De Belleville's politeness was not less than Paget's. It would be a pleasure, said De Belleville, to introduce any friend of Miss Lloyd's to the Cercle Militaire. Any member of any recognised London club was welcomed. He looked very keenly at Paget, who was for the moment confused. John Paget was a member of no club. Anonymity had some drawbacks. One may pretend to be many things and possess many qualities, but there is no flight of fancy that will place one's name upon the members' list of a club to which one does not belong.

He replied that, being in Bruges for so short a time, he would not impose upon M. de Belleville. The Belgian took his leave gracefully. It had been his intention for some three years to marry Nina Lloyd. A friend of his in New York had satisfied him that she was wealthy; and Amer-

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ican dollars multiplied by five represent Belgian francs. He longed for the gay life of Brussels and Ostend.

Miss Scott declined to visit any of the shows. There was work for her at home. Nina thereupon decided to go with her, and Paget was left unhappily alone.

"I wonder when I shall see you again?" he said as he shook hands.

"Bruges isn't a very big place," she said with a smile. "Good-night."

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## CHAPTER SIX

### AT THE ENGLISH SPORTS CLUB

THE interest that the English take in the city of bridges to-day is not commercial, nor has it to do with royal remembrances. Its nearness to London, its cheapness of living and the excellence of some of its educational establishments for girls have made it an ideal spot for retired army or navy officers with limited means, and there is consequently a little band of such living here all the year round whose interests are practically identical. It is a point which has been seized upon by many Continental literary men that the British must have sport wherever they go. In a locality such as Bruges the opportunities are not many; but such as they are they have been utilised, and the English Sports Club, at the hamlet of Assebrouck, a mile from the Porte de Gand, is the result.

Paget could not conceal it from himself that Nina's presence made all the difference to his *joi de vive*. There could be no other place, thought Paget, so likely to attract the athletic, young American girl as a tennis and golf club where a



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certain friendly society might be enjoyed. And since the secretary of the club, on learning that Miss Lloyd, her aunt and Raoul de Belleville were the only people in Bruges known to the aspirant, had very obligingly had him proposed that very evening, Paget walked on the following afternoon to the Porte de Gand and made his way to the ground.

His arrival caused some interest: a new man was always welcome. The seats outside the modest pavilion were occupied by men, maidens and matrons engaged in the eminently English fashion of taking tea. Paget had hoped that Butward, the secretary, would be there to introduce him; but he could not tell that Butward was even then trying to get his ball from the bunker that safeguards the third green.

Paget was far from being nervous, but there was no sound that could have made him happier than to hear his name called with that delicious accent of the educated Louisiana woman. He turned to see Nina seated at a table around which most of the men in the club seemed to be grouped. She made room for him by the simple expedient of asking the callow youth at her side to sit at another table.

"Go and tell Louis to make some tea," she told

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another. "Now," she said when he had been introduced to the men about him, "do you come here by accident or design?"

"Design," he answered. "I'm an annual member in good standing. I planned to meet the secretary at half-past two. I forgot his name, but he's rather a nice chap who talks as if he had known much sorrow. I must have walked halfway to Ghent."

"Hush," she said. "Mrs. Butward is at the next table."

"Who's taking my name in vain?" said Mrs. Butward pleasantly.

"It's a new member," said Nina—"Mr. Paget."

Paget bowed.

"Your husband was good enough to put me up."

"I hope you play golf," she answered. "He finds so few to play with him. Here he is."

Butward came toward the table and greeted Paget cordially.

"Why so *triste?*" demanded Nina.

"I lost a ball," he answered, sipping his tea —"the second in three weeks."

"I'll leave you to talk to Mr. Paget while I finish my set," she cried, jumping up. She looked

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at Paget's costume. "It's a pity you haven't your things here," she said.

"They're coming," he returned promptly.

She was playing with an officer of Lanciers against a girl named Portman and an Englishman answering to the name of Lewis. Nina was a far better player than Miss Portman, but the seeming superiority of Lewis to the soldier made matters even. Paget was settling himself to watch an interesting game when Mr. Butward called to him.

"I want to introduce you to Mrs. Broad," he said. "She is one of the oldest members of the club."

Paget looked up at a very tall, angular woman with grey hair, who inclined her head with dignity.

"Mr. Butward would have expressed it more correctly," she said, "if he had said that I had belonged to the club for a longer period than any other member."

At this point Butward left them; he said he was going to look for his ball.

"Pray sit down," said Mrs. Broad kindly. She motioned to a chair which precluded all observation of the game. Mrs. Broad poured him out some anæmic liquid which she labelled tea, and he had the leisure to look at her closely.

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The widow of a London lawyer, she had been driven from her suburban home by the fear of a libel action, and had come to Bruges, where she dwelt with her daughters in a small house. A witty Oxford don, who spent a long vacation in Bruges, had named her the "Pyramid." When asked the reason, he reminded his questioner that a pyramid was a solid figure bounded by plane faces.

Mrs. Broad set herself to find out who were Mr. Paget's parents, and what his occupation and his prospects.

"Are you likely to be here long?" she demanded.

"Until my book is finished," he returned.

"You are a writer, then?" she asked. "Fiction?"

"Lace," he returned gravely. "My book on the effect of lace on the morals of nations will be an uplifting one."

She regarded him steadily for a moment; but he remained undisturbed.

"Your name is familiar to me," she said. "Where did Mr. Butward say you came from?"

He sought alliteration's artful aid.

"Pangborne," he said. "I am a Paget of Pangborne."

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"That is fortunate," she returned more brightly. "I know the Pagets of Pangborne intimately. Mr. Broad was the attorney for Mr. Septimus Paget."

Paget was a little startled.

"I don't mean Septimus!" he cried.

"How should you," she said, "since he died unmarried? You must be John's son."

He shook his head cheerfully.

"Try once more," he said.

"There was only one other son," she exclaimed, "and he—well, the least that can be said is that he did not resemble his brothers."

"Kind hearts," returned Paget with prodigious gravity, "are more than coronets."

"It is singular," she reflected, "that even in such a family as the Pangborne Pagets so black a sheep could be found."

"Let the dead past bury its dead," he remarked.

"Is Peter Paget dead?" she cried. "We heard he was convicted of some misdemeanour in New Zealand."

"My father was never convicted of any misdemeanour," said Paget. He felt a sudden liking for Peter Paget.

"I have heard my husband say that clever

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barristers repeatedly obtain freedom for their clients."

"What use were they, else?" he cried.

"Where is he?" she asked.

"Fruit farming," he told her cheerfully. "Haven't you ever heard of Paget's Peerless Pippins? He has miles of orchards."

"He must be doing well financially," she said. The future of her daughters was ever before her. They had none of them ever been asked in marriage.

"Moderately," said the other. "He has a mad passion for giving his money to missionaries. Some effect probably of those young days at Pangborne when Seppy and Jack were good little boys and Peter was the bad one. Like Carnegie, he says it's a sin to die rich."

"I am not sure that he is justified," said Mrs. Broad heavily.

"That's why I am working so hard on my book."

"Let me see," she said, "what was the subject?"

"The moral effect of lace on the economy of a republic. Bryce will write a preface and Crane is designing the title page."

He met her eye without hesitation.

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"And where——" she commenced.

"Pardon me for a moment," he cried, rising, "but Miss Lloyd wants to speak to me."

Mrs. Broad turned her massive frame about and threw a glance at Nina Lloyd that had little of kindness in it. "What they all see in that girl," she muttered, "I cannot imagine."

She looked at the further court where her four plain daughters were playing pat-ball tennis and her face softened. She was genuinely attached to them. They were swans to no one else.

"Poor man!" said Nina with mock sympathy. "Did the Pyramid get hold of you?"

"It did," he laughed. "And it won't be counted to you for righteousness that you failed to warn me."

"Have you satisfied her?" the girl demanded.

"I have lied with all the fluency I possess," he said.

"She'll never forgive you."

"I shall die peacefully without it. She asked the most impertinent questions. She wanted answers to them and she got them. How did you get on? Before I was captured it seemed rather a close thing."

"They won," she said carelessly. "Seven to five. If Captain Bougival hadn't wasted so much

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time in trying to think of pretty things to say it would have been our set."

Paget looked in the soldier's direction and acknowledged that he was more than usually good-looking. It came as a shock to him to find what a dislike flamed up against this man to whom he had never spoken. He had experienced the same feeling when he had seen De Belleville whispering to her at the *carrousel*.

"Are you going to play again?" he asked.

"One isn't allowed to monopolise the courts," she said.

"Then, if you aren't too tired, show me the links."

"Four holes ingeniously contrived to make nine can hardly be worthy of a showman," she laughed. "You should see the Knocke Links."

"I shall be charmed," he said. "When—to-morrow?"

She looked at him for a moment before answering. His readiness to seize on the opportunity seemed to stamp him as the flirt he had not, during the time she had known him, shown himself to be. She was used to the wiles which men of all ages exhibit, and was as well able to guard against what was unwelcome as most girls. She knew that he could have held her arm more closely and forced

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himself into a more intimate footing during the night of adventure in London had he chosen. The behaviour of Bougival or De Belleville would have been far different.

"Very well," she said. "We can leave Miss Scott on the Digue while we walk over the links. If you're very good, some day we'll walk over into Holland, where you can get cigars for five centimes each that are worth smoking."

"Who told you so?" he asked.

"Lots of men," she said. "Raoul, Mr. Lewis —oh, heaps of them! You must remember," she went on, "that I know this part very well. She raised a hand. "Hush! Mrs. Broad is talking about us. Our left ears will burn."

Mrs. Broad was possessed of a heavy, flat voice which had nevertheless some carrying qualities. She was with another member of the club in the little room occupied by the ground man, who was also invaluable in the preparation of the *al fresco* teas which were a feature of the club.

"Miss Lloyd," boomed Mrs. Broad's voice, "generally manages to attract all the eligible men, whether they are English, American or Belgian."

"She is very pretty," said her companion.

"It is not my style of prettiness," retorted

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Mrs. Broad with a sarcasm which was unintentional. "I am pleased to say that to-day she is flirting with a young man whom I shall not permit my dear girls to know."

The other lady yawned.

"Why not?" she demanded. "He looks rather nice."

"I disapprove of his father," said Mrs. Broad. "My husband and my husband's father—family solicitors with a large practice—knew all the Pagets intimately."

"She has established the antiquity of the Pagets, if nothing else," he whispered to the girl.

"That seems to me to have no bearing on this man whatever," said Mrs. Broad's companion. "What is he? He has the service cut about him."

"A journalist," cried Mrs. Broad with some appearance of scorn, "a yellow journalist engaged in writing a series of articles on the immoralities of lace makers."

"Most interesting!" said the old lady placidly.

"That may be," said Mrs. Broad grimly, "but it is not my idea of respectability."

Nina sprang to her feet.

"I can't stand any more of it!" she cried angrily. "She is the only woman I have ever

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wanted to scratch. Let's go and watch the croquet tournament."

When they were seated she continued:

"She tries to damage everybody. The idea of dragging in one's family history!"

"You mean my father?" he asked.

"What business is it of hers?" she cried.

He smiled.

"I'm afraid she's got hold of the wrong man. It was my fatal desire to be agreeable. I should have answered with equal readiness to the Pagets of Penzance or Plymouth or Pimlico."

"Then I've been sympathising with someone else! I begin to distrust you."

"I assure you you need not," he returned more seriously. "I would rather you trusted me. When I was young I admired your national saint, Washington of the Cherry Tree, and thought it wrong to tell anything but the truth. When I found how men and women, particularly women, ask all sorts of personal questions and expect truthful answers, I became appalled. It was like opening a page of one's private journal and publishing it to the world. I had no secrets, but I had lots of little silly ambitions, hopes, projects, which I felt I could not reveal. One must never hesitate in answering—you know it's suspicious. To protect

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myself and all these little ambitions I spoke of I became a fluent romancer and answerer of unnecessary questions. Thus do I dispose of the Binnses and the Broads."

"But when is one to believe you?" she asked.

"You need never make any mistake," he told her. "I shall always tell you the truth."

"Are you always so generous?" she demanded.

"I haven't often such an excuse," he said.

She laughed.

"Look at Mrs. Broad glaring at us. She is clucking to her chicks. There they are." She pointed out the four exponents of pat-ball tennis who were passing.

"On the whole," he said, "I'm glad she doesn't consider me respectable. Are you going home?" he asked as she rose to her feet.

"Captain Bougival offered me a lift." He saw a smart, hog-maned cob waiting by the gate attached to a ralli-cart.

"Rather a nice turnout," he admitted.

"The cob won at Olympia last year," she said. "Captain Bougival drives very well."

"What time shall I call for you to-morrow?" he asked.

"About half-past ten—*Au revoir!*"

He watched her climb into Bougival's cart and

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take the reins. The cob, high-mettled and well bred, was restive at being kept waiting, and he saw with admiration how well the girl drove. The looks which Captain Bougival bent upon her annoyed him. He sighed audibly and sat down on a bench and lighted a cigarette.

He felt suddenly very lonely. Used to club life and the companionship of men of kindred tastes, he was now masquerading in the sleepiest town of northern Europe, when he should have been in London at the season's height. He thought of the dances, dinners, opera and theatre parties he was missing, and of those delightful afternoons of polo at Hurlingham and Ranelagh to which, during his three years of foreign service, he had looked for so ardently. But for the thought of to-morrow's excursion to the sea, he would have taken the first boat for Dover.

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## CHAPTER SEVEN

### THE QUARREL

THE next morning when Paget called at the small *pension* where Miss Lloyd and her aunt were staying, he was appalled at the lack of comfort, and the bourgeois atmosphere surrounding it. The room into which he was ushered was dowdy; its only pretension to ornament the highly-coloured plaster cast of popular saints. How was he to know that the elderly lady had chosen this place in order to absorb what she thought was the local colour of Belgian life!

A little to his surprise, it was Miss Scott who greeted him with:

"Nina will be down presently. Before she comes," she went on a little excitedly, "I feel it my duty to be very frank with you."

Paget bowed.

Miss Scott grew more and more perturbed. The possibility of her niece marrying, and the consequent abandonment of the yearly visit to Europe, was always before her and filled her life with an unhappiness that was forever showing itself in



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an absorbing jealousy of the girl's men friends. She began severely:

"Mr. Paget, you followed us to Belgium—and not to study lace-making!"

"It may be," he acknowledged, "that I was sufficiently interested in Miss Lloyd to try to see more of her."

"It has been my experience that men usually fall in love with Nina and then go away thinking they have been badly treated. Mr. Paget," she said decidedly, "Nina cares very little for men."

"Why do you tell me this?"

"Because my niece is the only being in the world I love. Her mother and she do not get along very well—and I do what I can, in my little way, to be a mother to her." She sighed. "Nina is an heiress—moving in what may be termed the best society in America—the nicest people. She is very self-willed. I know very little of her inner life and thoughts. But I do know—that is, I think she is going to make a great match and marry an American."

"I could become naturalised," laughed Paget.

"But you couldn't become the hard-working man that I want her to marry. I don't believe you have ever worked. It's because I fear that you are growing interested——" Miss Scott hesitated;

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then with more courage, she continued: "I think it only right to tell you that, at the present moment, she is engaged, perhaps I should say almost engaged, to a New Yorker of great wealth and industry."

"Industry?" he queried. He was not lacking in a certain amount of respect for the views of the woman before him; but nevertheless he was far from liking her dream of the girl's future.

"Yes," replied Miss Scott with enthusiasm, "industry. And, although heir to a great fortune, he goes to his Wall Street office every morning. He is rarely later than nine."

"I am sure," he returned politely, "that such a habit would ensure a very happy married life. May I congratulate Miss Lloyd?"

"Oh, no!" cried Miss Scott. "She would never forgive me. I must beg of you not to mention it. Good-morning, Mr. Paget! I am sorry I cannot join Nina and you this morning."

Miss Scott limped away leaving Paget a prey, that is, in a measure a prey, to some disquieting thoughts. He was persuaded that to be a friend of the girl would be the height of his ambition; but try as he might, the spectre of the industrious young millionaire, who fairly revelled in rivalling his clerks in punctuality and attention to busi-

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ness, rose before him. Fortunately, however, it was soon blotted out by the vision of Nina herself, looking charming in a costume of white serge, entering the room.

"My aunt won't be able to come," she said gaily.

"I am extremely glad," he answered.

She looked at him curiously.

"I imagined at least you would profess regret."

"I made a compact to tell you the truth," he said. "I do not regret it. Why should I?"

"On the whole," she said, "I think you are rather an incomprehensible person."

"I feel a very happy one," he returned. "It's a glorious day; the ride will be delightful, and I shall be improving my knowledge of geography."

In crossing the Grand Place to take the steam tram they met Bougival in uniform. He was needlessly effusive in his greetings, thought Paget, and raised a feeling which he would not admit was jealousy.

"Why are you so silent?" asked Nina when they had left the lancer and were in the tram.

"Do you like him?" demanded Paget.

"Enormously!" she returned. "He dances exquisitely and rides very well for a Belgian.

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Also, he writes pretty verses and possesses a charming mother. They live in a great house in the Rue Longue surrounded by high walls. I stay there sometimes." After a moment, she added: "Don't you think him good-looking?"

"Yes," admitted Paget, "but I think his tennis is simply rotten. He does nothing but slam and serve hard into the net."

"That was because he was trying to compose verses," she said, "as he played—like Cyrano de Bergerac in his duel with the Vicomte. Don't you remember:

*"'Ballade du duel qu'en l'hôtel bourguignon*
*Monsieur de Bergerac eût avec un bélître'* . . .

You'll admit that verse-making is difficult under such circumstances as a fast set with Mr. Lewis playing against one?"

"I'll confess I couldn't do it," he said.

"But you think you could beat him with the racquet?"

"I'd like to try," returned Paget.

"You shall," she promised. "I'll give a prize to be competed for by all the men in the club. The idea will please Mrs. Broad very much."

"Not so much as it pleases me," he admitted with a smile.

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"You think you will win, then?" She smiled. "What conceit the normal man has!"

"What encouragement, you mean," he said. "I haven't touched a racquet this season, but I shall do all I can to win."

"Be honest," she said. "Wouldn't it be truer if you said you would do all you could to beat Captain Bougival?"

"I wish I hadn't made that compact," he returned. "Yes, it would be truer."

She looked at him innocently.

"Why?" she demanded. "You hardly know him by sight even. Men are very odd creatures."

"They are perfectly simple to understand," he said. "I think we often deceive ourselves, but I don't think women ever have much difficulty."

"Whence this worldly knowledge?" she demanded.

"From you, in part," he answered. "I have seen your influence on Myers of Bloomsbury and these gentlemen of West Flanders."

"I hope you mean that nicely," she said. "Has my influence been good?"

"I should call it disturbing," he said. "Yes, that's the word. For your sake De Belleville would willingly assassinate me and drop my corpse

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in a canal. And Bougival, he looked at me as though he were sorry the good old days of duelling were gone."

"And does my sphere of influence end with these two men?" she asked him.

"By no means," he answered. "It extends to me, too. Last night when I had finished dinner I wrote a very long letter to my father on the manifold beauties of platonic friendship. To-night I shall write and ask him to tear it up."

"Why blame me?" she demanded. "And why destroy such a valuable document?"

"It would be honester," he returned. "Yesterday I really thought that friendship was the best thing in the world."

She was almost glad when two priests got in the compartment and sat next to them. They were old, withered men who took snuff and chatted incessantly. Paget regarded them with uncharitable eyes.

She had met too many men and had been in society too long not to know that Paget had fallen in love with her. There are so many subtle signs that women may observe, which to the experienced are almost certain indications, that a mistake was most unlikely. That he had admired her from their first meeting she knew very well;

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that he had followed her from London was equally obvious; and this sudden flaming jealousy of De Belleville and Captain Bougival—these were symptoms she had seen too often. She looked at him with added interest. He was a type she had always liked. And she was one of those girls who demand of the men they like a certain skill in exercises and a certain bodily strength. He had lifted her to the top of the iron railings on that memorable night in London as though she were of no weight, and she was almost sure that he excelled in sports. She did not know that there were not three polo players living his equals and none his superior. Passionately fond of equestrian exercise, she had liked Bougival for his fearless riding. She could not know that Lord Mountcastle, one of the best gentleman riders in Europe, was the John Paget sitting rather sulkily by her side and glowering at two garlic-perfumed old priests.

At Westcapelle the old men alighted. But Paget had had sufficient time to reflect that he must go slower in his wooing. It was as well, he reflected, that the priests had come in time. He might have made a tactical blunder.

"You look very cheerful," said the girl.

"I am at peace with all the universe," he an-

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swered, lifting his cap politely to one of the priests, who glanced at him through the open window.

"You change quickly," she said. "In Bruges you seemed to view things as through a glass darkly."

"It was a necessary transitional stage," he answered more gravely. "I have never been sufficiently foolish to pretend I knew anything about women, but, as I said, men are perfectly simple to understand. I begin to understand myself at last."

"You take no credit for rapid perception then?"

"The knowledge doesn't humiliate me, it makes me happy."

"I am at sea," she cried.

"And I," he answered softly, "know the haven where I would be."

"That sounds rather like nonsense," she said, smiling. "Or else it is very deep. Is there any chance of your making this desired haven?"

"I don't know," he returned simply; and for a time did not speak.

Try as he might, Paget could never understand why he had been so blind as not to know from the first moment that the interest he had felt in Nina Lloyd was love. It was not a wilful decep-

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tion, for he was essentially honest, and exactly when the knowledge of it was born he could not say. He knew only that he loved her, and that no matter what view his father took of the duties of his rank he would never marry any other woman. He felt amazed that he could ever have drifted into an engagement with Mildred Heronhurst. Certain confidences made to him by his friends who knew him for a man who never betrayed such, were made suddenly plain to him. He had never been able to understand what had led some men he knew to abandon their former interests and take their sole pleasure in the company of the woman they loved. Not they, but he, had been blind; for the miracle had been made plain to him. He glanced almost timidly at the girl. She was looking from the window at some peasant children by the roadside. Her perfect lips were parted in a smile, and he felt almost as he imagined some humble soul must who bows at the shrine of his saint. He had met pretty women by the score, and clever women, and women who were both clever and beautiful, but never such as she. He was vaguely troubled by a feeling that this should have been the lady of his dreams. And he acknowledged the fact that he had never dreamed. It almost seemed as if he had been disloyal; to have lived

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his thirty-two years without having some intuition that he would meet her. And with this there came over him that strange, sweet humility which must ever spring of a first love. Although her voice was the one of all others he was most charmed to hear, he was yet strangely grateful for her silence. So many things had to be thought of, so many plans made, that he was almost overwhelmed.

The girl looked at him and wondered what had set his jaw so firmly.

"You look as though you had made a great resolve," she said.

"I have," he answered. "It's the only one I have ever made that is worth speaking about. Do you know," he continued, "that I've always affected to laugh at what I didn't understand; I have made a vow not to be so tolerant. Isn't that worth recording?"

"It's a sign of regeneration," she returned.

They were both oddly silent as they walked over the short grass of the links and presently came to a little hillock which commanded a view of the sea. She pointed to the east.

"That's Flushing at the mouth of the Scheldt," she said. "Antwerp is about fifty miles up the river."

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He looked toward the west.

"Not there," she cried. "That's Heyst." She looked at him reprovingly. "You are not a very good pupil. I'm afraid you haven't any deep interest in geography."

"I have," he insisted. "I think it's a fascinating subject, but I can always read about Breskens and Walcheren. If I feel like it I can take the boat from Harwich any week and come and revel in them. They will be there during my lifetime at least. How often shall we sit here and look at them?"

"So you want to talk about yourself?" she asked.

"I'd rather talk about you," he answered frankly.

"Why?"

"You're such a mysterious sort of person," he laughed.

"I'm a woman," she said. "It is our *métier*. But, all the same, I don't know what you mean."

He was sitting on a little hillock of turf while she was perched upon one slightly higher. He was looking up at her eagerly, smiling and happy.

"You're very young," she said suddenly.

"Young!" he cried. "Is two and thirty young, then?"

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"It may be anything," she answered; "but with you it amounts to boyishness. How long have you known me?"

"Two weeks," he said promptly.

"Two weeks, and in that time we have met perhaps six times."

"Seven," he corrected, "counting to-day."

"Well, then, seven," she laughed gently; "and you are boyish enough to think that I, who have surrounded the real me in myself with an armour of reserve, am going to tell you what my innermost thoughts are. It shows you to be very young."

"Or very impertinent," he added. "Believe me, it means merely that I am honest. It was this very armour of yours which interested me. One puts on armour for defence. Even the Maid of the old Orleans laid hers aside sometimes. One doesn't dwell always in the enemy's camp."

"That would be a good name for life," she said meditatively—"the 'enemy's camp.'"

"Do you think I am an enemy?" he asked, looking at her steadily.

She glanced at him for a moment and then turned her gaze out to sea, where some stout little boats of Heyst were beating up to their pebbly beach. Paget was honest, she decided, and he

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could be a true friend to a woman. There was something about him which attracted her. Not all women care for the bold look of a Bougival or the incessant compliments of a De Belleville. It would be very easy and very pleasant to give him her confidence.

"Am I an enemy?" he repeated.

"No," she said, "you are not an enemy." Then she sighed.

"Why should that make you sigh?" he asked.

"I was sighing to think of a letter I forgot to post in London until it was too late."

"Was it so serious?"

"I was invited to a wedding," she said, "and I forgot to acknowledge the invitation. Is it serious, do you suppose?"

"Not at all," he decided. "It's not worth a sigh on a day like this." He sniffed the warm, pleasant wind blowing over the dunes. "When one is healthy and young and the best of life lies before one, there is no need for sighing."

"Oh, the youngness of you!" she laughed.

"Oh, the happiness of me!" he cried.

"I suppose there is such a thing," she observed.

"As happiness!" he exclaimed. "Mysterious

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Maid of New Orleans, of course there is. Don't you feel it?"

"You are more mysterious than I," she said, evading an answer. "Much more so."

"I!" he spoke up quickly. "My life is an open book."

"Which you keep closed," she returned drily.

So little was he used to thinking of himself as the friendless Paget who was not even blessed with a past, that her remark came as something of a shock. He had no answer for her.

"There are a number of things about that night of extraordinary adventures that I haven't yet asked you," she said. "The fact that I have not yet asked should speak for my lack of curiosity."

"Or interest," he retorted.

"After we got into the wrong house we met a very tall priest. What did you say to change his severe front to a friendly one?"

"I explained the affair to his satisfaction." Paget was aware that his explanation sounded a lame one. "He took a generous view of the case."

"What was his name?" she demanded.

"Trevenose," he told her. "Father Trevenose."

"Then you weren't romancing when you gave

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him as your reference? You did really know him?"

"Since I was a child," he said.

"I've misjudged you," she said with a smile. She rose to her feet. "I'm hungry."

"Luncheon is indicated," he cried, springing up, "and I have all the better appetite for being restored to your good opinion."

She threw him a quick smile.

"Was Smith also a boyhood friend?"

"I've dropped Smith," he retorted gaily.

The little luncheon at the only hotel which was opened for the season was passed very happily. The girl seemed in extraordinary good spirits and made elaborate plans for the tennis tournament.

"After the patronising way you spoke of Captain Bougival's play, I shall expect you to beat him badly."

Paget smiled.

"I'll do all I can," he said.

"There are several men in Ghent who might come over. And I know a man in Brussels who won in Wimbledon last year. He'll probably beat you."

"He'll get the opportunity," conceded Paget cheerfully. "But I'm no Doherty at the game, remember."

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"It's a pity you haven't the gift of verse," she said mischievously. "The duel of wit and tennis between you and Jacques Bougival would go down into the history of the game. He plays very gracefully, and I can imagine his winning stroke accompanied by:

*"'A la fin de l'envoi—je touche.'*

Couldn't you rise to the occasion? England has produced the most wonderful poets in the world."

"If you'll give me leave to practise my maiden efforts on you, I'll start instantly. I think I could write verses to you," he said slowly. "I've read sonnets and rondeaus on eyebrows and dimples and tiny feet and curling hair, but never to the colour on the lady's cheek. There's a delicious flush on your cheeks that should make a poet out of any man."

"That wouldn't do at all," she said. "I proposed it should be man to man. The other is too commonplace. Surely you've written verses."

"I fear they lacked the real stamp of genius," he retorted. "I was younger then by half than I am now. I was just going to Eton, and the daughter of the head of my preparatory school charmed me beyond measure. The parting seemed

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to rend my soul and poesy escaped through the rent."

"Don't you remember any of it?" she asked.

"Only that I sent her my love in a chalice."

"Why a chalice?" demanded Nina. "That isn't a customary vehicle, is it?"

"Her name was Alice, you see. I had no choice but 'valise,' and that seemed so prosaic."

"She was a great deal older than you, I suppose?"

"Years," he confessed. "She married the village curate within six months of receiving my effusion. It was my earliest proof of woman's unkindness."

"So you were at Eton?" she said after a pause. She knew that to the great school near Windsor the children of the obscure are not wont to go. It was, she had heard, not only the great school of the British aristocracy, but also of the rich. That she had chosen to stay with her aunt in a boarding-house in Bloomsbury and at an obscure Bruges *pension* was merely a whim. Why should Paget have come to Bloomsbury, too? she wondered. She found herself beginning to take an interest in him.

"Five years at the dear old place," he said. "I

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loved Eton, with its placid green meadows, which the kindly Thames flooded each November."

"I've been there," she said. "It was two years ago."

She racked her mind to recall the name of the scholars who wore queer gowns and had none of the high fees to pay. She had an idea they were called Oppidans.

"Did you get a scholarship?" she demanded.

"Was I a 'Tug'?" he said. "Good heavens, no! Only the clever boys are 'Tugs.' I was too fond of cricket and lawn tennis to shine."

"So you admit your prowess at tennis, do you?" She laughed. "Poor Captain Bougival! How are you at golf?"

"A third-rater," he answered. "Thoroughly happy if I get a good smack off the tee. My putting is rank and I can't manage small approaches."

"I will arrange a golf tournament just to see if you speak the truth."

"I will cheerfully play at anything you please," he returned, "from ping-pong to polo."

"You play polo?" she said.

"I'm as keen as ginger on it," he said.

Decidedly Mr. Paget was a perplexing person. Nina Lloyd had moved in the smart hunting set

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of her country too much not to know that polo is a game which poor men cannot play. Mr. Paget was either so much better off than his present mode of life would indicate, or else he was merely bragging. She detested men who bragged about a prowess which was not theirs even more than she loathed those who assumed airs of financial importance. Bougival was a far better player than one would have guessed from his game with Miss Lloyd, the game which Paget had observed critically. If in three sets he could be beaten on the courts he knew so well, his conqueror would be a player of merit. Any contest of this kind raised the keenest interest in the girl.

"The tennis tournament will come off next week," she said decidedly. She looked at her watch. "We must go now, Mr. Paget."

"It isn't late," he said. "Why not wait for an hour?"

"Assebrouck," she answered. "Captain Bougival and I are playing Mr. Lewis and his sister at five."

She was not inclined to talk on the way to Bruges, and it was sufficient happiness for Paget to ride by her side, his arm touching hers, and contenting himself with frequent glances at her exquisite profile. What would be his plans for

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the future he did not know, and for the moment did not care. He felt almost appalled at his good fortune. That she, this wonderful girl, had permitted him such a friendly intimacy was a piece of luck which he felt could not last. He made up his mind that at Assebrouck, if he chanced to be introduced to Bougival, he would be courteous and exhibit no trace of jealousy. She would feel that he had no right to be jealous, and indeed he confessed that it might be embarrassing to her.

His plans miscarried through the attitude of the Belgian. Possessed of a conceit which had been fostered by a doting mother, Bougival thought that Nina would marry him if he asked her. He did not realise, as his rival had, that these few weeks spent in Belgium were a small part of her life—that she was one of the most popular girls in New York's smartest set. Until the coming of Paget, Bougival had never feared a rival. De Belleville was small, poor, merely a lieutenant in the National Guard, and was not, therefore, to be considered. But he could see that this stranger was a self-contained man of the world, with the easy, well-bred manner that women like.

Bougival played exceedingly well in the set with Nina; and Paget, sitting watching, admitted that he had not guessed the Belgian's true form.

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When it was finished the lancer strolled over to Paget and took a seat by his side. He was exceedingly glad to know that he need not try to express the disagreeable things he meant to say in any but his own tongue.

"That was a very good set," said Paget pleasantly. "Miss Lloyd's driving is splendid."

"You admire Miss Lloyd, perhaps?" said the Belgian.

Paget looked at him quickly. Bougival's face was impassive.

"Naturally," said the other. "What man would not?"

"We feel here," said Bougival, "that Miss Lloyd belongs to us." There was something vaguely antagonistic in his voice.

"Such a feeling must give you great pleasure," Paget returned.

"It has been the aim of the committee to keep the club very select."

"A very good aim, too," said the other.

"And when by any mischance a member has been elected without proper investigation, a member whom we do not like, we endeavour to let such a member understand this and withdraw."

There was no questioning the tone of his voice now. It was hostile.

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"Your confidences are very interesting," returned Paget.

"Mr. Butward tells me you gave as references Miss Lloyd and M. de Belleville. I learn from Miss Lloyd's aunt that she met you less than three weeks ago in a London *pension*, where you forced yourself upon them."

Paget flushed, but tried to keep his temper.

"You must have the welfare of the club very much at heart," he said, "to pursue such investigations."

"M. de Belleville tells me that he was introduced to you at the fair, and that but for the unwelcome meeting he knows nothing whatsoever of you."

Paget spoke very quietly.

"Let us understand one another. You mean that I am not a fit member of your club?"

"What quickness of apprehension!" exclaimed Bougival with mock admiration.

"But that is your meaning?" the other persisted.

"Not entirely," returned Bougival. "I meant that to give as a reference a man to whom one has been casually introduced is not the act of a gentleman."

Paget looked up to see Nina regarding him

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closely. It would never do for her to suspect the conversation.

"Mr. Butward," he said, "asked me if I knew anyone in Bruges. I told him only Miss Lloyd, her aunt and M. de Belleville. I had no idea of offering any of them as personal references."

Bougival smiled insolently.

"Ah!" he said, "I see."

It was Paget's turn.

"What perspicacity!" he remarked.

Bougival had a notoriously bad temper when crossed in any manner. He was thoroughly angry to learn that Paget had passed some hours with the girl. He laid himself out to insult the man he supposed to be his rival.

"I have conceived for you," he said, "a very deep aversion."

"You could offer me no sincerer compliment," said Paget calmly.

Bougival clenched his fists.

"I am a soldier, sir," he returned.

"You wear a uniform," Paget corrected.

"We are not in England now," said the Belgian.

"I find your conversation most instructive," replied Paget, "although, to be candid, I had suspected what you say already."

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"In Continental Europe," Bougival said angrily, "when we have a quarrel do you know what we do?"

"You choose out a place where ladies are gathered so that you may insult a man with impunity? Is that it?"

Paget's coolness had an infuriating effect upon the other.

"You are adept at excuses!" cried he.

Paget had always laughed at the idea of duelling being taken seriously. His great-grandfather had been a notorious gambler and duellist in the days of the Regent, famed throughout Europe for his cynical wit and his skill with the rapier. Bougival's insult had torn aside the prejudice with which the Anglo-Saxon is wont to regard such settlement of disputes, and the dead and gone duellist lived again in his great-grandson. He had never experienced in his life such a detestation of any man as of this sneering officer of Belgian cavalry, who arrogated to himself proprietary airs over Nina Lloyd. Bougival leaned nearer to him.

"It takes a very little while for one to cross the Dutch frontier. On the dunes one meets nobody. A difference can be adjusted simply. Do you understand?"

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"Perfectly," returned Paget. "But I suggest that if you do not wish to call attention to your quarrel you had better moderate your voice. Unless, of course"—he shrugged his shoulders—"you wish for help."

Bougival constrained himself.

"Good!" he exclaimed; "excellent! I think we need go no further than the sand dunes where Miss Lloyd took you to-day. There is something fitting in punishing you there."

"In *trying* to punish me," Paget corrected equably.

"I shall do it!" cried the other.

"Perhaps," assented Paget. "One never knows. In any event I beg you not to celebrate the affair in verse."

Bougival made a gesture of anger.

"Keep still, man," said Paget quietly. "Can't you see Miss Lloyd watching us? Is it your quaint idea of chivalry to make her notorious? Surely you see that we must keep this from her."

Bougival glanced quickly toward the girl and saw Paget had spoken the truth.

"M. de Belleville will no doubt be pleased to accompany you to the links as soon as possible. He will find Major d'Etraille waiting for you. We

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might play a foursome. You play golf, I take it?"

Paget smiled. The proposition seemed an excellent one. To play this sort of golf seemed entertaining. He was no less angry than the Belgian, but held himself in better control.

"Whatever M. de Belleville suggests I shall follow," he answered.

He bowed slightly to Bougival and rose to his feet. Nina Lloyd was walking toward them and he did not want her to guess from the scowl on the other's face that they had quarrelled. Whatever doubts he might entertain of the propriety of his conduct in the future, he was determined to carry out on his part the suggestion made by the man who had insulted him.

"Did you have a good game?" he asked as he met the girl.

"I wasn't playing very keenly," she answered. "I was thinking."

"Ten centimes are yours if you will tell me of what," he said, smiling.

"Presently," she returned. "Captain Bougival!" she called.

Bougival left his seat and sauntered toward her. He turned his back deliberately to Paget and addressed her.

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"I am yours to command," he said, "as you have known for years."

She looked about her. There were people passing and repassing. A number were watching the croquet players, and others of the club members were clustered by the tennis courts. Mrs. Broad was sitting by the first tee watching one of her daughters endeavour to make a successful drive.

"I want to talk to you both about the tournament," she said. "But there are too many people here. I think we'll walk round the links and discuss it." She turned to Paget. "I want you, too."

Mrs. Broad watched the girl stroll gracefully out of sight accompanied by the two best looking men in the club. She remarked bitterly that in her young days such things would not be tolerated at all.

Paget knew that it was for a more important reason than she had stated that he had been asked to accompany the two to a distant corner of the little links. He reflected irritably that Bougival had raised his voice and had made gestures which to a close observer must have seen were inimical. Bougival, for his part, was glad that the girl should know. Although duelling is not recognised in the Belgian service any more than in the Brit-

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ish or American, there is a breadth of interpretation of anti-duelling legislation, which in the little kingdom is frequently stretched to passive acquiescence in such a code of honour.

On the green of the fifth hole, which was conveniently screened by trees, the girl paused and looked at her escorts.

"Were you quarrelling?" she demanded.

Paget did not answer. He seemed to find some difficulty in extracting a cigarette from his case.

"Did you hear me?" she cried, stamping her foot. "I asked if you were quarrelling. Mr. Paget, I am talking to you."

"I was making arrangements," he answered, "to play a foursome. M. de Belleville and I against Captain Bougival and a Major——" He looked at the lancer inquiringly.

"Major d'Etraille," said Bougival, "of my regiment."

"Major d'Etraille doesn't play golf," she asserted.

"We are teaching him," said Bougival with a smile. "You have often told him it would do him good. You may therefore blame yourself or take praise to yourself, as you see fit, for our little expedition."

She looked from one to the other. Bougival

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had adopted a rather theatrical pose which became him amazingly. His arms were folded and there was no effort at concealment. He looked very handsome, she thought. Paget was standing very upright and lacked in his carriage the grace of the Belgian. He was paler than she had ever seen him and sterner. Of the two she felt instinctively that he looked the deadlier.

"It is not true, Jacques," she said. "I saw you talking angrily. You were not arranging any game of golf."

"Mr. Paget will tell you what I said was true," he answered.

She turned to Paget.

"You promised to tell me the truth."

Bougival sneered.

"What a pretty compact!"

"Be quiet," she commanded imperiously. "Mr. Paget, were you quarrelling?"

"Yes," he said.

"What about?"

"Captain Bougival is not satisfied about my fitness to adorn the club. Really, it's not important, Miss Lloyd. I may well fall below his high standard."

"Were you going to fight?"

"We are," said Bougival grimly.

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"Bougival threw an evil glance at his rival"

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"Jacques," she said, "I have known you for five years and you have often told me that you valued my friendship."

"And I meant it," he said. "I value it more than anything else."

"Unless you promise me to give up this stupid idea, not only will I never speak to you again, but I will tell the Governor that you contemplate fighting a duel. I shall tell your colonel, and I shall tell your mother."

Bougival threw an evil glance at his rival.

"My honour is more than anything to me. Do you think I can bear to be thought a coward by Mr. Paget?"

She stretched out her arms to Paget appealingly.

"You wouldn't hint at such a thing, would you?"

"I have never thought Captain Bougival a coward," he said. "I resented and still resent what he said."

"Would you apologise?" she asked the Belgian.

He shook his head decisively.

"No."

"You are both behaving abominably," she said. "Everyone thinks I am mixed up in this quarrel.

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I was not the only one who saw or heard it. Do you both want to make my name a by-word? I am more than surprised at you, Mr. Paget. You come of a people who do not fight duels."

"I come of a people who no more care for insults than do any others," he said stiffly. There was in her tone a touch of asperity which he could not think was justifiable. He felt there was something very childish in the whole business, but his resentment toward Bougival was far from dying.

"It comes to this," said the girl: "If I don't get your promise to behave properly I shall leave Belgium to-morrow morning early. I don't want to leave yet, but I can't remain and be talked about in this absurd fashion. I am not so silly as to suppose you will be friends or shake hands, but I do expect you to consider me and my convenience. I have just been arranging the tournament with Mr. Butward, and you two are to play off the first match to-morrow; and here you go and spoil everything."

"I will play Mr. Paget," said Bougival, "whenever you like."

She smiled at him gratefully and turned to the other.

"And you?" she demanded.

"As you please," he answered.

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Paget raged inwardly at Bougival, at the girl, and at his own crass folly in taking upon himself the rôle of John Paget. He was conscious that he was regarded as the cause of the quarrel. Bougival's manner towards the girl was charming. They walked back to the club, engaged in the most amicable converse; while the other, a pace or two behind, was ignored. It seemed to him that this position of playing second fiddle would gain for him the contemptuous pity of all the club members. He made a vow to leave Bruges directly the match was over. He renewed it when he saw Nina climb to the seat of Bougival's dog-cart and drive off without a further look at him. And this was the girl who had spent those memorable hours with him on the sandy dunes overlooking Knocke!

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## CHAPTER EIGHT

### THE TENNIS MATCH

When Paget arrived at the ground on the following afternoon he found that there was half an hour to spare before the play began. Bougival had not yet come, and he changed into his flannels and waited patiently for the only duel he would fight with him. Presently, Mr. Butward introduced him to a charmingly pretty little blond English girl, who had just returned from a stay in London. She was vivacious and full of eagerness as to the outcome of the match.

"For the reputation of our country, you must beat him," she said. "You've seen him play?"

"Two or three sets," he answered. "I don't feel at all sure of escaping a horrible licking. He seems abnormally active."

Miss Buxton laughed.

"So should you be, too. Why not?"

"Out of training," he said briefly. "I haven't touched a racquet this year."

"What's your strongest game?" she asked.

"Placing," he answered. "I win more by that than anything when I'm in form."



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"Here they come!" cried Miss Buxton, looking along the winding avenue which led from the Ghent road to the club. "She's wearing Belgian colours. Red, black and yellow suit her style, being dark."

He could see Miss Lloyd driving Bougival's smart cobs tandemwise. Her hat was adorned with the Belgian national colours. Bougival from his lower seat was gazing up at her with a smile. In a dog-cart behind came some of his brother officers. Isabel Buxton knew that Paget had paid Nina Lloyd a great deal of attention. She had heard it rumoured that they had even once been engaged. She wondered how he would take this mark of favouritism.

"Poor Mr. Paget," she murmured. "There's not a person with your colours on."

"Indeed there is," he replied, smiling with the hope that Nina would see. You're wearing Eton blue. *Floreat Etona!*"

"I'm glad," said the other. "I want you to win."

She was herself a notoriously good player, an excellent judge of the game, and already thoroughly excited at what she considered an international match. There had rarely been such a gallery at Assebrouck. If he fumed at the injus-

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tice of having to play in an unprepared state, Paget did not show it. Nina came over to him and sat by Miss Buxton's side.

"Traitress!" said the English girl, pointing to her colours.

"I'm not an Englishwoman!" cried the other. "You don't mind my wearing them?" she asked of Paget.

"I expected it," he said.

"I don't know why you should!" she cried, flushing. This was a different Paget, she thought. If he had smiles, they were only for Isabel Buxton. She rose to her feet a little angrily. "My colours are the favourites in the betting," she said.

Isabel Buxton pointed to the Eton blue.

"Favourites don't always win," she laughed. "True blue forever, you know."

It was astonishing how readily and completely, thought Nina, Miss Buxton had assumed charge of Paget and his interests; and it showed how abominably fickle the man was to allow it and look as though he enjoyed it. She looked from the man to the girl as they chatted together; they were on excellent terms. Miss Buxton saw the look and took it at its feminine value.

"Nina's really keen on him," she thought; and

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then, being an adept at the eternal game which has been waged between man and woman since the world was young and has never ceased to hold its interest, she prattled merrily on. A conclave of her sisters had decided that she was at her best when she smiled and showed her vivacity and laughed prettily. She had not Nina's features, but incomparably more sprightliness. "Come here when the set is over," she said, "and I will give you the benefit of my advice. I know Captain Bougival's play absolutely."

"Of course I will," he cried. "But I warn you you are going to be disappointed."

He spoke truly, for she observed with chagrin that he was beaten by a love set. He seemed to have no judgment for distance and the almost phenomenal agility of the Belgian gave him little chance. The two girls who were most interested in the game were also the two best judges of it. A stray stroke here and there of Paget's showed that in form he might be brilliant. When it was over he walked over to Miss Buxton's chair and put on his sweater.

"Looks pretty bad," he said.

"Yes," she agreed seriously. "Your lack of practice will give him the match."

"What worries me," he said seriously, "is that

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my service won't come off. I could beat him if only I could get them over. His wonderful quickness and my slamming into the net are winning for him."

"In form are you better than he?" she demanded. "I shan't think it conceited, but I want to feel hopeful."

"I think I am as good," was all he would admit.

The second set started just as disastrously for Paget. His attempts to kill balls met with bad luck. They either went out of the court or into the net. Love four against him was called when it was his turn to serve.

Until then he had been half afraid to try his service, which had the reputation of being perhaps the fastest of any British amateur. No other chance of redemption offered itself. The first ball was not a fault and flashed by Bougival like lightning. The second Bougival returned, but out of the court. Paget won his first game.

Bougival lost his service game. His opponent's eye was improving, and all the Belgian's activity could not make up for the other's deadly placing. Paget won the set, six to four. He won the deciding set, six to two. Bougival congratulated him shortly. He felt perfectly certain that if he

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had a little more practice against those deadly swerving serves he could win. Nina and Isabel knew that in form Paget could always beat Bougival. The victory brought very little happiness to the winner. He was obsessed with the feeling that Nina loved Captain Bougival. She had given every indication of it. She drove with him constantly; she wore his colours and had taken his part in their wretched squabble in a fashion which was obviously unfair.

He hardly heard what Miss Buxton was saying. She was a charming girl, he admitted, and pretty, but he was in no mood to talk while behind them sat Nina making tea for Bougival and some of his friends. Mr. Butward, with his air of settled melancholy, joined Paget and his companion.

"I congratulate you," he said. "To-morrow you will have M. Marambot, of Brussels, as an opponent."

"Mr. Paget will beat him," said Miss Buxton decidedly. "He's very little better than Captain Bougival at his best, and to-day he was at the top of his form."

"I don't think I shall have the opportunity," said Paget, speaking with a distinctness which was apparent, as he intended it to be.

"Are you going?" cried the girl. "What a

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shame! Nina and I and Captain Bougival and you would make a perfectly ripping four."

"I had hoped," observed Mr. Butward, "that we might have enjoyed golf at Knocke together."

"I'm afraid not," returned Paget. "My father is an invalid and wants me at home."

"I must give you a farewell tea," said the girl. "I'll tell Louis to give me my things."

"Don't," he said. "Have tea with me instead. Isn't there rather a decent tea place near the cathedral?"

"Place Simon Stevin and the Rue des Pierres," she said. "They have the most delightful *pâtisseries* there. As a tourist, you know probably that Simon invented the decimal system." She rose from her seat and looked about her. "I have a small sister somewhere," she said. "You must include her if I go."

Nina watched Paget and the Buxton girls as they took the short path for the steam tram. He had bowed to her as he passed. And this would be the last time she would see him. Mysterious John Paget, who had come so strangely into her life as an accessory of unpremeditated crime, was to pass out of it because she had chosen to visit her displeasure upon him for Bougival's quarrel.

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For sheer unreasonableness she gave the unhappy Paget the award. Bougival was whispering complimentary things into her ear. He was reminding her of the first time he had seen her, and how beautiful she looked.

"Don't, don't!" she exclaimed. "I'm not pleased enough with you to listen to that sort of thing."

"Not pleased with me?" he cried. "Why not?"

"My colours went down to defeat," she said. "Isabel Buxton's blue was triumphant."

"The fortunes of war," he said. "At that game of golf it might have been different."

"I forbade you to speak of it," she said. "Really, I think men are abominable. They always do the wrong thing and think the wrong thing. I should be happier in a convent."

"Where are you going?" he demanded, rising with her.

"To get some coffee somewhere," she answered. "The tea, the eternal tea, is smoky."

"I crave coffee, too," he said. "We'll drive into the city and get some."

When Paget came into the *confiseur's* by the Place Simon Stevin, Captain Bougival and Nina

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were there sipping coffee ices. Paget's flood of talk, which had passed the time away agreeably enough, suffered an access of silence. Isabel Buxton guessed the reason.

"Stupid children," she muttered.

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## CHAPTER NINE

### THE TRYSTING PLACE

It was Paget's intention to take an evening train for Ostend, spend the night there and make an early crossing. He was packing his things when a note was brought to him. The writing was unfamiliar.

"I shall be on the Rempart de la Bouverie at the corner of the Rue de la Cloche at half-past eight to-night. N. L."

He was profoundly agitated by this unexpected message. What could she want with him after treating him so strangely? A wild happiness surged up in him that almost frightened him. And then, as quickly, he was depressed by the fear that she might want him for some trivial purpose; or even that the initials N. L. were added to a practical joker's note. The suspense was not easy to bear. He was upon the ramparts by eight o'clock. Few people were abroad. It was blowing coldly along the canal. Many times he made the circuit of the Rue de la Cloche, the Rue de la Bouverie and then down the Rue du Miroir



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to the Rampart without seeing a soul. It was rather more than half-past the hour when he saw her coming. He had thought of many things to say to her. He had determined not to betray any deep feeling. She should see that his front was calm and unruffled. He would at least retreat in good order. But when she held out her hand and the gas lamps showed that she smiled, he was tongue-tied, the reproaches he had hugged died away and he could have kissed the feet of the woman he loved.

"I like to walk in the wind," she said. "Let us go round to the windmills, Don Quixote. I think they are on the St. Croix rampart, the ones I mean."

This was on the other side of the city; he was dumbly thankful.

"When are you going?" she demanded.

"I was going at eight," he answered.

"Did I keep you against your will?" she asked.

"You kept me," he said gently.

She walked very fast, and it was not until they reached the Porte d'Ostende that she spoke again.

"Why did you quarrel with Captain Bougival?" she demanded.

"You know perfectly well," he returned,

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"Bougival is insanely jealous. He thinks that he has the right to be."

"He has no sort of right at all," she said hotly. "Surely you don't think he has."

"I can't tell," he said guardedly. "You seem to like him very much. He is an old friend and —oh, well, I suppose I did not offer the soft answer which might have turned away his wrath."

"You should have done so," she said.

He stopped in his promenade.

"I shouldn't," he cried; "and I never will! Bougival was jealous, as he admits, and you know; and I declare, I was a thousand times more so. For what other reason, do you suppose, I threw aside all my national prejudices and was as eager as he to go out to the golf links with De Belleville as my second? And then when you found out you must blame me and punish me!"

"How did I punish you?" she asked.

"Didn't you walk back to the pavilion with him, ignoring me completely? And whose colours did you wear to-day? His, of course."

"Did you beg me to wear yours?" she said a little shyly.

He paused, for they had resumed their walk, and looked at her eagerly.

"Would you have worn my blue?" he asked.

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"I don't know," she said, laughing. "How can one tell? Jacques Bougival gave me his, and the colours of Belgium are colours I love to wear, even though Belgium had nothing to do with them. Aren't you just a little impetuous, Don Quixote?"

"I am very miserable," he said.

"Why?" she demanded. "You won to-day in a most sensational way. If I were a man I should be very happy."

"That's only a little thing to win," he said. "When one might win so much more."

"Your match to-morrow, you mean?" she queried with seeming innocence.

"I'd forgotten about that," he said.

"You were running away," she said severely. "Do you want to spoil my tournament?"

"Do you want me to play?" he returned.

"You'll spoil everything if you go away before it's over," she replied. "Besides M. Marambot, of Brussels, two regular members of the club have entered, who are every bit as good as Captain Bougival. You may not win."

"I will if you wear my colours," he said, his heart thumping in a strange and unaccustomed way. "Will you, Nina?"

The girl smiled in the darkness. It was the

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first time he had called her Nina, and it was not in her heart to rebuke him.

"I am not sure that light blue is my colour," she answered.

"You look beautiful in everything," he said.

"I want you to win," she said slowly, "and if you promise to beat M. Marambot, I'll think about it. I'll wear blue, Mr. Paget. That's a bargain."

A hundred things surged through his mind. Usually he was adept at a gracefully turned compliment or tender, semi-tender nonsense such as women expect, but he found himself awkward as a boy, incapable, in the presence of the only woman he had loved, of saying what he felt. But over all there was a deep happiness. She was kind and would wear his colours.

"And when the game is over," she said, "you shall take me to that nice *confiseur's* where I saw you this afternoon with the Buxton girls. You didn't eat a single cake," she asserted. "I was watching you. Hadn't you an appetite?"

"I was never so perfectly miserable in my life," he admitted.

"It would please Isabel to hear you say that," she returned.

"It wasn't her fault," he cried. "She seemed a very jolly, sporting sort of girl. It was you.

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I was thinking about you all the way to the shop, and directly I entered it, there you were with Bougival. That man seems to haunt me. I can't even think of that perfect day on the links without thinking of his scowls when we met him in the Grand Place."

"I'm afraid you have rather a bad temper," she said. "I hadn't an idea you were so vindictive. Would you like to know the real reason that when I found out about your quarrel, your stupid, childish quarrel, I walked back to the tennis court with him and then drove back to Bruges?"

"Very much," he returned.

"It was because I could trust you better than I could him. Poor Jacques is so very conceited and rather boastful. If I had walked back with you I think he would have lost his head and struck you. If that had happened I should have let you do as you chose. I am a Southern girl," she said, "and I could never like a man who took a blow. You wonder, perhaps, why I wrote to you to-night. It was to tell you just that. I have had plenty of time to tell him that if he tries to fight or do anything absurd he will suffer for it. The Governor is very strict since poor Pierre de Boismaison was killed at Courtrai last year; and

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I am too fond of Madame Bougival to see her son court-martialled."

"I wish I could be sure that you were not fond of her son," he said. The idea that she felt he was a safe, steady, dependable sort of man was not a very attractive one. He had never cared to play Major Dobbin's rôle in life.

"You haven't any right to say that!" she cried.

"I have every right!" he answered. "I suffer for this man, don't I? It is because you think his wounded vanity may break out that he is pampered, while I am left to myself. I suppose if he frowns to-morrow you will take my colours off and wear his."

She laughed softly.

"I believe of the two you are much the worse-tempered."

"I am," he said, a little ashamed of his outbreak. "I need very careful watching. If you are not kind, heaven only knows what may happen."

"You mustn't threaten me," she said.

"I'm not," he answered. "I'm suggesting a course which is the best for all. I have mapped it out. You must let me be constantly near you; your restraining influence is needed."

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"Your jailer?" she queried. "Is that the rôle assigned to me?"

"I wish you would be something more than that," he sighed, overcome by an unaccustomed timidity.

"I don't think you need looking after," she laughed. "Of course you are quite a mysterious person, and one can never tell anything definite about you."

This was not very reassuring. Did she mean, he wondered, to let him know that whereas she had known Bougival and his relatives for years, this unknown man had sprung without introduction into her life, and had the audacity to become jealous? And, indeed, she was filled with a very deep curiosity to know something about him and his relations.

"Isabel Buxton," she went on after a moment, "is one of those girls with brothers who know all about cricket averages and golf and tennis handicaps. She plays in dozens of English tournaments, and has never heard of John Paget; and she says you are too good not to be known. She reads the *Field* industriously every week."

"My name is John Paget," he said, "but I haven't been in England for three years till this season. That explains it, you see."

"I never doubted it," she answered, "but I

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wanted to point out that such a mysterious individual had no right to become inquisitive about, well, about Captain Bougival."

"You know why I asked about him," he replied. "It wasn't any idle curiosity; it was because I was never so in earnest about anything in my life."

"Why?" she demanded lightly.

"You—a woman, ask that?" he said. "Haven't you seen——" He broke off as she stopped at the door of a large house they were passing. He had not noticed that they had turned down the street where she lived.

"You are not going in yet?" he pleaded.

She swung open half the great door leading to the covered porte-cochère and stood provokingly out of his reach.

"I must," she said. "It's terribly late and Miss Scott always gets anxious if I am out much after dark. You may call for me at two o'clock to-morrow, if you like."

"If I like!" he repeated. "Good-night!"

The door closed and he heard her footsteps echoing as she crossed the flagged walk, and finally die away. Then he made his way hotelward filled with the most perfect happiness that it had ever been his lot to experience. His soul sang within him.

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## CHAPTER TEN

### LOVE ON THE RAMPARTS

If Isabel Buxton had any doubts as to Paget's class as an exponent of lawn tennis, they were quite dispelled when she beheld M. Marambot, an idol of Brussels and Spa, go down to defeat before him. Marambot put up a gallant fight. He was steadier than Bougival and particularly adept at the now almost discarded net game. But Paget's placing left him few of the opportunities which he looked for, and from the start of the only two sets that were needed he had no chance at all. Marambot could not understand it. Not since he took up the game had two love sets been registered against him.

Had Isabel Buxton known that she was watching Viscount Mountcastle, of the Seventeenth Hussars, she would have known, with her gift for names and averages, that he had been twice a runner up for the championship, to be defeated, but not ingloriously, by the more brilliant of the Doherty brothers.

When he had changed from his flannels he sought out Nina. She had never looked so bright



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and animated, he thought. She held out her hand enthusiastically.

"I'm proud of my colours!" she cried.

"It's because you wore them that I won," he said softly.

"What about the truth compact between us?" she laughed. "For shame, Mr. Paget!"

He laughed, too. Nothing could stem the happiness that he felt when he was alone with her.

"I hope you haven't forgotten tea and cakes under the shadow of St. Simon of the decimals?"

"Of course not," she said. "But let's take M. Marambot. He looks so terribly depressed. You owe him tea and cakes, at least. And Isabel Buxton hasn't had an opportunity to speak to that nice boy with the Trinity ribbon in his hat. Why shouldn't we play the part of a kindly Providence and ask them, too?"

He looked a little disappointed.

"It's a charming idea," he returned. "They ought to be very grateful to you."

"I knew you wouldn't mind," she said.

"But I do," he answered. "I mind so much that I only consent under one condition."

"Which is——?"

"That you come for a walk on the ramparts

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to-night. The wind is just rising, and after dinner there'll be all the breeze you want. Be kind."

"I suppose I must," she said. "I'll ask Isabel and her young man if you get M. Marambot."

Marambot accepted Paget's invitation. When he said that he was returning to Brussels by the eight o'clock train he was asked to dine at his opponent's hotel; but only when Paget had elicited by careful questioning that a very important engagement in the capital city rendered such a train the latest that he could take.

Isabel Buxton, the Trinity man, and Monsieur Marambot talked incessantly at the *confiseur's*. Paget and Nina Lloyd were unaccountably silent. He had remembered in an unhappy flash that Miss Scott had spoken of the possibility, or even the probability, of her niece's engagement to a wealthy fellow countryman of exemplary habits. At the time he had felt that Miss Scott was exaggerating in order to keep him away. But the thought that she might be correct, and that the girl he loved might even now be the fiancée of someone else, appalled him. His love brought to him the knowledge that any danger, any obstacle which a courageous man might by

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his own efforts remove, would, were he confronted with it in pursuit of his lady, be welcomed as the only fitting path to the gaining of the prize he sought. There is in every healthy man this instinct to action; but he knew that there were no efforts which he might as an honourable man use to supplant such a rival. It would not be easy for him to ask the girl whether such a one existed. Miss Scott, he remembered, had begged him not to refer to it in any way. But since it was the most important thing he could know, he must ask without bringing in the aunt.

Monsieur Marambot proved a very entertaining companion at dinner, but seemed, thought his host, lamentably careless as to catching the necessary train. Paget was wise to have ordered a cab for the short distance between hotel and railway station; otherwise, Marambot must have missed his engagement in Brussels; for as he grew to like his vanquisher, so he confided in him the most intimate details of his life.

. . . . .

Punctuality, essentially a man's virtue, was treated with good-humoured contempt by Nina Lloyd, as Paget soon came to discover. He had become intimately acquainted with all the houses that lay about the rampart end of the Rue de

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la Cloche before she appeared. She never betrayed any hurry of movement, or any consciousness that her unpunctuality might have disturbing effects.

"You have deceived me," she said as she greeted him. "There isn't enough wind stirring to make a ripple on the canals. I don't care much for walking unless half a gale is blowing."

"Fortunately, there's a seat," he said. "It isn't a bit cold. Let's sit there."

She allowed him to lead her to a little wooden rampart seat. He was wondering how, without offending her, he could broach the subject of the other man once mentioned by Miss Scott as a possible successful suitor, when she broke in upon his thoughts.

"What are you thinking about?" she demanded.

"You," he said instantly.

"I suppose you couldn't say anything else," she laughed.

"Not truthfully," he returned. "I was wondering if you'd be offended if I asked you something about your life in America."

"Try and find out," she advised.

"I suppose you put in the ordinary sort of

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time out there that one does here—dinners, dances, house parties——"

"Exactly the same," she assented. "We have inherited all the pleasant vices of Europe."

"You must meet a lot of men," he said.

"Not so many as one does here," she said. "Our young men are so busy—much more industrious as a class than the ones here."

He sighed heavily.

"Is that all?" she demanded.

"Are you engaged?" he said.

"Isn't that rather an odd question?" she asked. "Really, Mr. Paget, I don't see that you have any right to ask."

"I have," he said stubbornly. "That is, in a way, I have."

"How?" she said, and it seemed that her voice was cold.

"I love you," he declared simply. "I love you so much that if you are engaged to anyone else it will be the most terrible news I have ever heard."

He looked at her anxiously; but by no sign could he read what emotion, if any, had been raised by what he had told her.

"You see," he went on, "I feel that I must know."

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"And if you learned that I was engaged to someone in America or Captain Bougival, would you say I had behaved badly and ruined your life?"

He looked at her quietly for a few seconds.

"I shouldn't say that," he returned, "because I shall always look back on the time I have known you as the one perfect month of my life. Please tell me," he insisted. "I think I have a right to know. If there is no such man, I want to think I have a good fighting chance. If there is——"

"Well," she asked, and her voice was not very steady, "suppose there is such a man—what then?"

"Then I don't think I shall ever be perfectly happy again."

"I think you are exaggerating."

"Then you have never loved anyone," he told her. "Nina, you are very cruel."

"How do you know I have never loved anyone?" she asked impulsively.

"Then it was true that you are engaged?" he asked.

"How swift you are to jump at a conclusion!" she retorted.

"If you knew how much your answer means,"

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he said, "you would not fence with me now. I ask only to know if you are bound to another man."

"Not yet," she said almost shyly. "I'm not engaged, but I'm rather fond of a young man who"—she hesitated for a moment—"is blind."

For a moment her hand lay lightly in his and she whispered:

"Why can't you see? Why are you so blind?"

In the realisation of his supreme happiness Paget was conscious more than anything else of a wonder, a strange, almost boyish, wonder, that this blessed thing should have been vouchsafed to him. A certain self-sufficiency, natural to the rich titled man of the world, whose career has been one having in it few elements of aught but success and few moments of the abasement of the humble-minded, was shorn from him when he learned that Nina Lloyd cared for him. His lips sought those he had craved for, and her eyes, the dearest in his world, looked into his with a tenderness which had an eloquence more beautiful than any speech. Never in life is there such an ecstasy as comes with the first great passion.

There passed between them the happy disjointed talk of lovers when exclamations are sen-

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tences and terms of endearment express depths of meaning intelligible to no one else.

"I used to think," he said presently, "that sometimes you didn't like me at all, even as a friend. How could I have guessed?"

"How could you have failed to?" she laughed. "Blind, blind boy, not to have seen that I tried not to let anyone know. It seemed to me that everyone must know that I felt glad when I saw you and made all sorts of little opportunities for you to come near me. It would have been easy enough to keep you away if I had wanted to. At first I tried to fight against it."

"Why?" he demanded.

She sighed.

"I think I have a great capacity for unhappiness. I forget who wrote it, but sometimes I am haunted by the sentence: '*As-tu réfléchi combien nous sommes organisés pour le malheur?*"

"Never, never!" he cried. "*Comme nous sommes organisés pour le bonheur.*"

"Don't speak so reproachfully," she retorted. "I don't always feel gloomy, and never when I am with you."

"Then it won't be long before it's permanently banished," he said contentedly, "for soon I shall be with you always."

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"See how my lord waxeth confident!" she laughed.

"It troubles me," he said more soberly, "that you should ever feel unhappy. If you were old and ugly and friendless there might be an excuse, but not with you, my beautiful darling. You and I have a great capacity for happiness. Surely you must feel it in your heart's heart!"

"I'm not always gloomy," she cried. "You know I enjoy life, but sometimes I think I am a pagan with a pagan's dread of impending fate. Perhaps that's why Hardy seems to me the truest living writer. Don't you remember how his men and women march blindly on looking often for happiness, to be met by the fate that nothing human can control? Fate has let me have so many of the little things I didn't want very much, that I feel when I want happiness and you that it may step in and deny me everything."

"You aren't doubtful of me?" he asked anxiously.

"Nor of myself, because I love you," she said tenderly; "but I'm rather a pagan at heart, dear, and——"

He stopped her with a flood of kisses. "I won't be made melancholy," he cried, "on the great day of my life! I see ahead more clearly

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than you. Fate is kind to us, and we'll live happily ever afterwards."

"I'll think so, too," she returned brightly, "but I don't want to tell anyone about——"

She paused a minute half shyly.

"About our engagement?" he said. There was disappointment in his voice.

"Humour me," she pleaded. "It will make no difference to us, so why should we consider anyone else? My aunt would be immeasurably shocked, and as I am with her for a few weeks longer, I don't want to disturb her. You don't mind?"

"My vanity is hurt," he laughed. "I wanted to show all other men that I had won the peerless damosel."

"I'm not a peerless damosel," she said. "And you mustn't place me on a pedestal."

"I shall," he asserted with determination.

"I shall topple off very quickly," she answered.

"You'll fall into my arms," he said.

"I'm there now," she returned.

"I wonder why," he said a little later, "your aunt dislikes me so much?"

"She thinks all Europeans are fortune hunters," the girl answered. "Otherwise she rather likes you. She has been led to believe that every

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other man she met on the Continent of Europe would be a count and all of them would be running after heiresses."

"She thinks I am after your money, then. How do you know I am not?"

"I don't mind if you are!" she cried contentedly. "What I have is yours."

"Keep it for dresses and pretty things for yourself, sweetheart," he whispered. "I have enough to pay the other bills. Did she think Bougival was also a seeker of fortunes?"

"Of course," she returned; "but, in addition, she thought I was fascinated by the glitter of uniforms. Frankly, I do like uniforms and gold lace and prancing chargers."

Paget thought with pride of his regiment, whose uniform was particularly fine and whose chestnut chargers delighted the eye. Theirs should be a military wedding, he decided, with a guard of honour from his own squadron lining the great avenues of oaks which led from the lych-gate of St. Vian's church to its wonderful Early English porch. But he experienced something of a shock when he remembered that the wedding would take place on another continent and that she was shortly to start for her American home.

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"When are you going back to America?" he asked.

"I want to be at Newport not later than the first of July. If I take one of the fast boats I shall not need to leave here for two weeks."

"In the matter of weddings, I suppose the bride's mother decides, doesn't she?"

"It's the custom," she admitted.

"Is your mother going to be *difficile?*" he asked.

She hesitated a moment.

"I suppose I'd better tell you that she and I don't get on very well. We make it a rule never to stay at the same places. Incompatibility of temper, I suppose."

She could not tell him that Mrs. Lloyd's unreasonable jealousy of her beautiful daughter was the sole cause, or that this had broken up their home. He would find that out later. It would probably suit Mrs. Lloyd to have her girl married and out of America. She could imagine her mother being particularly gracious to John Paget for that very reason. It had been one of the chief trials of her life that the mother whose beauty she had idolised had become, as the daughter grew to womanhood, so jealous that no longer was there even a pretence of affection between

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them. And a grief which had grown out of this was that Mr. Lloyd, in his pride and love for the wife so much younger than he, had grown to imagine, without ever having broached the subject to his daughter, that his wife was right when she said that the girl's headstrong disposition was the cause of the trouble of which he had divined so small a part. It was this friction at home which had made Nina Lloyd such a wanderer.

"I shan't like your mother," he said decidedly.

"You'll like my father," she said. "He's one of the delightful type of Southern gentlemen now fast dying out. Not a bit the kind they have on the stage, with the offensive headgear and love for mint juleps, but just a sweet, courteous, white-haired, perfectly charming man. You don't know anything about cotton, I suppose?" she added.

"Nothing," he returned. "I've seen it growing in Egypt and India, that's all."

"My father is one of the biggest cotton men in the South," she said. "He has offices in New York, Galveston and Mobile, with headquarters in New Orleans. I had a letter from him a week ago saying he was preparing to fight a ring of New Yorkers. Of course," she added with a smile, "you can't possibly understand how an old-time Southern grower and broker resents any inter-

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ference from Northerners. It fills him with horror." She sighed. "The North is getting very strong, though. It will win in the end. The North always wins everywhere."

"I wish I could help him," said Paget earnestly.

"So do I," cried the girl. "If I could I would be with him now. If I were a boy instead of a girl I should be useful. As it is, I could only be a foreign correspondence clerk, and probably not a very good one either. I may be prejudiced, but I don't think those Northern cotton men are playing quite the same straight, honest game that my father does."

"I'm afraid it's worrying you," he said.

She gave a delicious little sigh of contentment.

"I'm too perfectly happy to worry about anything to-night," she confessed. "I'm glad there is no high wind. You have tamed my pagan longing for storms, and I wouldn't change the little timid breeze in the lime trees for anything in the cave of the winds. I feel very safe with you and as though I had suddenly dropped all my worries and troubles." Her tone changed. "I wonder what I should have done if you had gone away, as you told Isabel Buxton you were

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going to do? Just in a little fit of pique you might have ruined everything. I see that I shall have to look after you very carefully."

"We are bound to one another by chains that nothing can break."

"If I were not a pagan at heart," she said slowly, "I shouldn't feel frightened at your boast. In that statement you defied Fate. I always pour out my libations to the unknown gods." She laughed more gaily, for her happiness would not permit her to feel more than a passing trace of despondency. "I always treat these unknown gods with great politeness and insert, mentally, at any rate, a clause which acknowledges their power."

"Strange child," he said, stroking her hair.

"Not strange," she answered, "but radiantly happy and grateful to my unknown pantheon that I met you and loved you and that you loved me. And to think," she added pensively, "that I thought I should never love anyone! The thoughts of youth are wrong thoughts, aren't they? Don't you understand me?"

"Not always," he said, smiling.

"What a simpleton you are!" she cried. "I am discovering myself to you the whole time. All I do or say or think means only one thing

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—that I love you." As the Belfry rang out its eternal tune, she sprang to her feet.

"I have never been out so late before!" she cried. "Poor auntie, if she isn't asleep, will certainly call on the police for assistance in finding me." She raised her face to his. "There will never be in all our lives such another night as this. If anything unforeseen should happen I shall always feel that there is one remembrance nothing can take away from me." She looked up to the clear summer sky. "Not even those unknown gods up there."

He experienced a sense of vague uneasiness. It was more than strange, he thought, that on such a night she would admit that there were evil forces powerful enough to work harm.

"I wish you would banish that from your mind, dear," he said gently. "I come from a part of England where the peasants are superstitious and believe in the evil eye and second sight and all the things modern education laughs at, and I'm rather superstitious, too."

She looked at him with added interest.

"Don't you ever feel afraid?" she asked.

"Not to-night," he said. "I feel as strongly as though I were a god, knowing futures and

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pasts, that happiness and not misery is in store for us."

She clung to him for a moment without speaking, perfectly trustful and happy in his love.

"I don't doubt you, darling," she whispered. "I only feel that suddenly I have discovered that there is one thing I cannot bear to lose." She slipped her arm in his. "Come," she said imperiously, "let us walk home quickly."

"Walk!" he cried, laughing. "I have wings to-night."

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## CHAPTER ELEVEN

### ON THE DUNES

THE next day they walked by the dunes to Sluys. At an early hour Paget had called for her and had instantly assumed an air of possession which was far from displeasing to Nina. After a delightful morning, they finally came to the hotel which had been recommended to them. According to his plan they were to lunch there preparatory to his taking part in the tennis tournament at Assebrouck. Secretly they were both inclined to regret that there was anything which compelled them to mingle with their fellows when they might be alone together.

On their arrival, Paget set himself to order a luncheon worthy of the occasion, and came back from his parley with the proprietor to find the girl sitting by the open window reading an English illustrated weekly magazine. He looked over her shoulder, to see that she was gazing at a page of illustrations of his father's Western residence, St. Vian's Castle. It was one of a series of great houses which the paper was publishing



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week by week. The girl looked up at him with a smile.

"The proprietress thought I might like to look at an English paper not yet a month old." She turned her attention to the St. Vian pictures and beckoned Paget to sit beside her. "Listen to this," she went on: "'The Great Hall, which has remained untouched throughout the centuries, contains a priceless collection of armour and weapons of various kinds, all of which have been used by the St. Vians or their men of arms in the heroic days!'" She poured over another half-page illustration of the castle. "'In the Western Tower,'" she read, "'is the room used by the unfortunate King Charles. Furniture and tapestry have never been disturbed; while some exquisite needle-work on bed and walls may be seen in the room once occupied by Queen Anne!'" She broke off abruptly, and looking up at him exclaimed enthusiastically: "How auntie would revel in Queen Anne's bedroom!"

For a moment, he wondered whether this was not merely a means of letting him know that John Paget was discovered! He searched her face for an indication of his suspicions; there was nothing there but an absorbed interest in the photographs. Nevertheless, it was with diffi-

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culty that he repressed the temptation to give vent in words to his delightful feeling that one day he would lead her to the great gateway and tell her that beyond it lay her home. There was never a lady, he vowed to himself, of all the proud dames in the great gallery from Vandyck's time and through the glorious period of Romney, Gainsborough, Reynolds and Lawrence, who was worthier of her place than this beautiful girl. Sargent should paint her. The great American painter had seen the soul of Lord St. Vian, and in his painting had depicted a man, essentially a haughty aristocrat, cynical through his sufferings and disappointment, the greatest of which, his heir would never know, but withal a man who delighted to do the kindnesses for which the unthinking rarely gave him credit. Paget wondered what, apart from her undoubted beauty, Sargent would read in Nina's face. It seemed to him that a certain high courage, a poise of the head which was more than a mere physical indication, marked her from the other women that he knew. The voice of Nina broke in on his musings.

"The only time I am possessed with envy is when I look at pictures like these," she sighed. "English castles stir something inside of me which is nothing but wicked envy. But don't

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pride yourself that I am not just as patriotic an American as you are an Englishman!" She looked at him curiously. "By the way, I don't remember to have heard you say that you are a patriotic Englishman?"

"Don't you think it is rather bad form to wave one's flag continually?" he asked quietly. "It seems to me that people who do it most are afraid their patriotism may not be observed of all men."

"I'm afraid I shall have to quash you a good deal later on," she laughed.

"I hope you won't," he said, also laughing. "As an Englishman I only want to be let alone."

"But I am not sure that that is a very American thing for me to allow," she retorted. Then she added: "We shan't quarrel—I only want you to allow that my country is the greatest country in the Western Hemisphere, and I will agree that yours leads the effete nations of the Eastern half."

"Great is diplomacy," he said.

Nina picked up the paper and read:

"'The Earl of St. Vian was formerly Captain of the Royal Horse Guards Blue, is a Knight Grand Cross of the Bath, and the patron of fifteen livings. His son, Viscount Mountcastle of

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the Seventeenth Hussars, is stationed in India with his regiment. The Hon. and Rev. Father Travenose of the Order of the Blessed Meditation is the only other living son.'" She stopped and looked up at him quickly. "Why," she exclaimed, "isn't that the gaunt ascetic we met in Bloomsbury?"

"The same," he answered, and for the second time Paget thought he was about to be unmasked.

"I feel that I know the family intimately," she laughed, putting down the paper. "There are times, though, where I feel thoroughly in sympathy with Socialists. It makes my eyes ache to read of such houses and see them reproduced for us humbler creatures to envy."

"Let me kiss the ache away!" he cried, lover-like.

The stout proprietor entered the room while he was pursuing this pleasing course. He was not greatly perturbed. He had often remarked profoundly that all Englishmen were mad.

Assebrouck was reached at four o'clock. The two last games were played and Paget was proclaimed the winner of the tournament. For one hour he had the delight of playing with Nina against Isabel Buxton and the Trinity under-

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graduate. He was in a joyous mood. What, he wondered, would Nina, who deplored the lack of good grass courts in her own country of fierce summer heats, say to those at St. Vian, which had been rolled and cut with regularity since lawn tennis began, and had been tended for a century before that? Never had he been so grateful for his high estate, his splendid homes and his ancient lineage as when he looked at the girl and realised how she would adorn them. There would be many other surprises for her, he reflected with a vivid, boyish joy. There had been no mention in the London periodical of the fact that his grandmother had been a lady of the Montmorency family, and had brought to her English lord a French Renaissance chateau in Lorraine, built in 1561 by Philibert de l'Orme.

And if, as a woman, she appreciated more than he the entrée to the most exclusive society in Rome, society which does not find itself in the foreign editions of Sunday papers, his sister, Princess Castelazzi, who adored him, would love her, if not for her own sweet sake, at least for that of her brother. She was of the Castelazzi who had given popes to Rome, who looked upon kings as their equals and had among them that Giacomo Castelazzi who died in the waters of

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Lepanto by the side of Don John of Austria on that day fatal to Ottoman supremacy, when Spain, at the bidding of a pope, forgot her ancient grievance and, allied with Venice and Genoa, fought against the enemy of their common faith.

He wondered what his father would say when he learned of his heir's engagement. Not usually afraid of the Earl's mordant wit, he dreaded any cynical allusions to his adventures. There was something too sacred in the matter to permit any jesting. That Nina would instantly win her way to the peer's affection he did not for a moment doubt; but he dreaded to put down the facts either too baldly or with too great an enthusiasm upon paper. He wished he could spare three days out of his happy hours to acquaint his father personally, but the sacrifice was not to be considered.

As he walked toward her *pension* he watched the girl very closely. Assuredly she was thoroughbred enough even to please his fastidious parent. Mary Castelazzi, he knew, would rave about the purity of her profile.

"The ramparts to-night?" he hazarded.

She shook her head.

"You've made me neglect poor auntie shame-

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fully," she said. "To-night I have promised to help her with some tracings."

"I shall expect you to walk on the ramparts to-morrow morning at seven," he returned. "The trees are delightful, and the Lac d'Amour and the Beguinage never looked so charming."

"Very well, my tyrant," she agreed,—"if I can wake up in time."

As he walked contentedly to his hotel in the Rue Nord du Sablon the girl was summoned by the man of all work, Clement, to the little room where Madame Verhoest usually received those of her guests with whom she was on intimate terms. To her surprise, Miss Scott, betraying signs of unusual agitation, was sitting alone.

"My dear," she cried, "I did not want you to go into our room until you knew!"

"Knew what?" demanded Nina, astounded at her excitement.

"Your mother is here!" she said.

"Is anything the matter with father?" cried the girl, who could think of nothing less serious which would bring her mother from early summer gaieties.

"I think not; but your mother is never communicative to me," said Miss Scott, with an aggrieved air. As the plain member of her family,

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Rachael Scott had never been appreciated at her true worth. A shy, awkward, delicate child, she had seemed of another race than her three sisters, of whom the most beautiful, the one she most adored, was now waiting in the room above.

A trifle paler than usual, Nina followed her aunt resolutely into the sitting-room and faced the tall, splendid woman there. Mother and daughter were honest enough not to make false affectations of the love which had never existed between them. Nina took Mrs. Lloyd's hand as she might take that of a stranger.

"My father?" was the girl's first question.

"His health is excellent—quite remarkable, it seems to me, for a man of his age," she was told.

"Then what brings you here? You have not made the trip for pleasure—you have always hated the ocean voyage, I know," said Nina, vaguely uneasy.

"I detest it," returned her mother. "I have come to take you back with me. We leave on the *Finland* from Antwerp to-morrow night."

Nina flung herself into a chair.

"I am afraid I shall have to disappoint you," she said when the others were seated. "I am not going for three weeks!" Nina had acceded to Paget's wishes that she remain longer than was

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her original intention. Never in her life had there been such days of delight as these she was passing in Bruges with the man she loved. There was a look of determination on her face and firmness in the voice that added: "Nothing will induce me to go home now."

"Nevertheless, I think you will change your mind," Mrs. Lloyd assured her with a confident smile.

Nina looked searchingly at the woman before her. Her mother seemed as beautiful as ever and radiantly young; but the daughter thought she detected signs of uneasiness, even of suffering, perhaps, which, whatever they were, had never been there before. It was therefore with a considerable change of manner, in a voice softer and more gentle, that she asked:

"Why should you want me to go back with you? Auntie, here, and I have always been together—travelled together; you and I, never! You have not needed me before."

Miss Scott shifted uneasily in her chair; she started to rise; but at Mrs. Lloyd's next words she sank back into her chair.

"I have promised Adolf Erbach that you will marry him next month in Lenox."

Nina flushed angrily.

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"You will have to break your promise, then," she said with an air of finality. "I loathe Adolf Erbach—have loathed him ever since I was a child. It was because I hated him that I made my father send me to school over here at the *Dames Anglaises*, when I would rather have gone to the Sacred Convent at home. A month or more ago I wrote a long letter to him, telling him frankly that under no conditions would I ever marry him."

"He has not received it," maintained Mrs. Lloyd; "I'm sure of that."

The girl thought of the letter, the adventures that arose from her endeavours to post it, and finally of her tearing it up into the little bits which floated out of a Bloomsbury bedroom and down on to the wood-paved street below.

"You are right," she acknowledged, "I did not post it. I remember now. But he knows how I feel."

Mrs. Lloyd laughed without mirth.

"That would not influence him in the least," she contended.

"It's sufficient for me," returned the daughter.

"Nina," argued Mrs. Lloyd, "do you think I am fool enough to come over here and ask you to marry this man unless I had some reason to

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think—know that you would keep the promise I made him!"

"There is no reason that would make me marry him," protested the girl. "I don't want money—I have all I want. And as for position—well, I'm a Lloyd of Louisiana, and he——"

"Nina," interposed her mother quietly, but in a tone which for the first time impressed itself upon the daughter as being something new and formidable, "you will be forced to marry him."

"Indeed! By whom?" cried the girl, in a voice that plainly showed anxiety. She felt that she was fighting some impending calamity. There had always been an air of strength about her mother; it was present now, together with a calmness that was most disturbing to the girl. It was beginning to dawn upon her that her mother would never have made such an extraordinary proposition unless there was something which as yet had not been told.

"I count on your love for your father," said Mrs. Lloyd, looking at the girl fixedly.

"Then there is something the matter with him!" Nina cried. "I knew you were keeping back something from me! Oh, don't tell me that he is ill!"

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All the love, which as a child she had wanted to bestow upon her mother and had met with a chilling reception, she had transferred to Mr. Lloyd; in consequence, this love was of a depth and strength uncommon even between father and only daughter; and it was one of her unspoken sorrows that his almost idolatrous love for his wife prevented him from seeing her injustice to their daughter.

"There is no sense in being dramatic. I do hope you won't make a scene," admonished Mrs. Lloyd. "What I have to say is pleasant neither for you nor me—you know that."

"Please continue," said Nina coldly; "I shall not make a scene."

"Your father has always been a big speculator in cotton," Mrs. Lloyd went on. "This year there has been a disastrous drought in Western Texas; the crop will be very poor. I understand these things very imperfectly," she made an impatient gesture; "but I know that your father is in a very bad condition, financially. Adolf Erbach has engineered things so skilfully that he can ruin your father at any minute. This is what he is going to do unless—— You understand?"

An angry flush overspread the girl's face.

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"How shameful!" she cried. "So like him. . . . He expects me to sacrifice myself so my father and you may keep your fortune—but I won't. There is no need of it. My own money, the fortune my grandmother left me, cannot be touched—that much I do know. Let Mr. Erbach do his worst, ruin father. You and he can have my money—every bit of it. There will be plenty for you both. Mother, mother, how can you sit there and even suggest such an unspeakable thing!"

Mrs. Lloyd paled; there was a cruel light in her eyes.

"Your heroics are well done, but not convincing," she returned with some heat. "You can save your father, or ruin him. But as to your sacrificing yourself—nonsense! Adolf Erbach is only forty-two, good-looking, and one of the richest men in New York."

"You will never alter my determination," declared the girl stubbornly. "I am sorry; but it's no disgrace to fail. Why, Mr. Erbach himself failed ten years ago. Did you think him disgraced? Father will be quite well off; so will you. Really, now, you know father never sent you here?" She spoke proudly. "He is not the sort of man to consent to my selling myself."

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Mrs. Lloyd's full lips parted in a smile that had little in it but scorn.

"You speak," she sneered, "as if you were already promised in marriage."

"I am," replied Nina. "I am going to marry —someone."

Miss Scott's face was a study. Many conflicting emotions were pictured there. Fortunately for her peace of mind, neither of the excited women paid any attention to her.

"And you have not let your father or me know?" Mrs. Lloyd was angry now. "It was quite in keeping with your secretive habits."

"Have you ever invited my confidence, mother? Have you ever offered me good counsel? Never —never! For ten years we have gone on our own way. Now I am glad and happy in the love of a man who has asked me to marry him. Even if I were willing to give him up, father would be the last person to ask me to do it. And I'm not willing," she concluded vehemently.

For some minutes the mother remained silent. Her daughter took advantage of the interval to scrutinise the face before her more carefully than before. But it was impossible to banish the oppression that hung over her like a cloud.

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Suddenly, Mrs. Lloyd seemed to come to a momentous decision.

"Nevertheless," she began, "you will go back with me, and you will marry Mr. Erbach." And then for the first time, turning to her sister, she said sharply: "Rachael, I shall have to ask you to leave me alone with Nina. Her obstinate attitude in this matter makes it imperative for me to see her alone. There are some things besides money, which Mr. Lloyd may lose, that Nina can never give back." The portentous words of Mrs. Lloyd's closing sentence were quite lost, it is needless to say, on her sister. In fact, Nina was quite alone with her mother when they were uttered. For the instant that her sister made her request, Miss Scott had quickly taken herself out of the room.

Considerably upset by all that she had heard, and never in her life had she been so frightened by the calm certainty of her sister's manner, Miss Scott found refuge in Madame Verhoest's little sitting-room. There she waited for what seemed to her an almost interminable time, though, in reality, it was not more than fifteen minutes before she heard Mrs. Lloyd's voice calling her name. On re-entering the room it was quite natural for this kind, if eccentric, little lady, to search

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the countenance of her niece for some tell-tale traces of the outcome with her mother. It was haggard and old; but on the mother's face sat a smile of triumph, and the drawn-down mouth had given place to an upward curve of elation. Looking again at the girl, it was evident to her aunt that Nina was struggling with an impulse to become hysterical. But Miss Scott was rejoiced to see that with every minute that passed the girl was conquering it, that her self-contained nature was coming to her aid, and that it was with a voice fairly calm that she said affectionately:

"Auntie, dear, I'm going—we leave to-night."

Miss Scott took the girl's hand and patted it soothingly.

"The boat does not go until five to-morrow," objected Mrs. Lloyd. "And I'm tired."

The girl turned on her mother; her eyes flashed.

"We leave in an hour's time," she announced curtly, "or not at all."

Too well she knew that at seven her lover would come looking for her to walk on the ramparts where the hour of her triumph had been spent. She must be many miles distant, beyond pursuit, by that time.

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## CHAPTER TWELVE

### JARVIS THORNE—AMERICAN

PAGET had long known that Nina was passionately fond of orchids. He had ordered a number, and on the morning he was to take her to the ramparts awoke betimes to procure them. It was only a quarter past six when he rang the bell of the *pension*. Blinking, heavy-footed Marie, the maid servant, answered his call.

"Put these," he whispered, slipping a franc into her hand, "in Mademoiselle Lloyd's room, so that she sees them when you wake her up."

Marie, who spoke little French, nodded amiably and went off to do her errand. She was halfway up the stairs before she remembered that quite suddenly mademoiselle and the strange lady, her mother, had left by the eight o'clock train on the previous evening. Love affairs had little interest for Marie; she would fulfil her part, she reflected sagely, if she gave them to the aunt of mademoiselle. Accordingly, Miss Scott was waked out of her sleep to find a room half full of strange, wonderful orange and purple flowers.

At seven Paget waited for the coming of Nina.



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At half-past seven he ventured to ring the bell. Miss Scott answered him. She looked very worn and grey and old.

"Nina has gone," she said. "She left with her mother last night." She looked at the young man more kindly than she had ever done before. "I fear it is bad news for you, too." She handed him a letter. "Nina wanted me to give this to you. It may explain things that I cannot understand."

She closed the door gently.

He looked at the letter, scarcely understanding. He was standing in the street. Work people passing him gazed a little curiously at the young Englishman holding a letter in a hand that trembled. He sensed instantly that there was disaster in it for him and walked, almost ran, to his hotel and shut himself in his room. For a time he could not bring himself to open it, despite the intensity of his desire to know its contents. He repeated dully, to ears which heard a flat toneless voice that seemed to belong to another man: "She has gone! She has gone!"

Then the Belfry carillon rang out the lilting refrain of the "Blue Danube" and brought him back to his senses with a shock that seemed almost physical. Quickly he cut the azure envelope

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of a tone and texture she invariably used in writing to him and took out the letter. It was dated at seven o'clock of the previous day. Written, indeed, not half an hour after he had left her there in the porte-cochère with a promise to spend a blessed hour before breakfast was ready and their world well awake. Never had such a sense of despondency settled upon him as he read:

"It is only an hour since I bade you good-bye, but my eyes are tired with crying and my heart is numbed from the anguish of having to leave you forever without even a farewell. My dear, my dear, if ever you loved me and trusted me, love and trust me in my dark hour, the hour when I leave you. I can fancy you reading this and asking yourself what has sent me away if I don't want to go. Do you remember the two last lines of Lovelace's verses, 'I could not love thee, dear, so much, loved I not honour more'? There lies the key to it, or as much as I may tell you. Something has happened which makes it imperative that I return instantly to my own country and never see you again or receive any letters from you. I pray you, if you have any pity for me, not to try to make me break an unalterable resolve. I want to think of you in the waste years

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to come as you stood smiling when I promised to come with you along the ramparts in the morning, and not as you would look if you tried to force me to tell you, face to face, what I am putting down here, and I had for honour's sake to remain dumb. One little month of love in a lifetime is all the comfort I shall have. It is bitter, my darling, for those unknown gods have struck me down in the moment of my woman's triumph, and I must go away leaving you to wonder if, after all, I was true. Dear, you must never doubt me. I want to think of you as one of those who have not seen and yet have believed. Good-bye."

Never once did Paget, as he read and reread the letter, hoping to glean some meaning which would help him to some decisive action, doubt the girl's love for him. The deep sincerity in which it was written communicated itself to him. Had she been a girl of less uncommon mould he would have felt more readily that there was some obstacle which might yield to their united courage. But Nina to him represented clever, brilliant womanhood, capable of judging for herself and judging rightly as to what was inevitable and what merely a temporary difficulty. There was plainly something against which she did not wish him to

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fight. To fight, even to go down to defeat, would have been bad enough, but to accept blindly a sentence which he could not but deem unjust almost maddened him.

To believe what she said without seeing a proof, yes, he could do this. She had inspired him with a love which made this simple. But to know that she was leaving with her mother, whom he vaguely feared, to sacrifice herself for someone else while he was given the lot of submitting unprotesting, raised in him a violent opposition. There must be some way, he reflected, whereby his ingenuity and wealth could get the better of circumstances.

Miss Scott declined to see him when he called at the *pension*. She would give no message and write no note. The old Flemand, Clement, pocketed a five-franc piece and told all he knew. It was merely that Miss and Mrs. Lloyd had driven to the station and their luggage was sent by the *grande vitesse* two hours later.

Clement's five-franc piece gave him an uncommonly good memory. He was certain that the baggage was labelled for Antwerp.

Paget looked at his watch and cursed the ill-luck that sent off a train to the great port of Belgium even as he gazed at the dial. There would be an hour and a half to wait! He drove to the

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agent of the Red Star Line and learned that the *Finland* sailed on the afternoon tide. A telegram to Antwerp did not disclose the Lloyds' names among the passengers, but he felt certain that this was the boat they would take.

In the train he hardly knew why he had taken the journey. To try to see her was breaking faith in a way, and yet what years of misery might be saved them both if only he could see her and talk to her. He would not, he assured himself a dozen times, try to disobey her, were he not hopeful that from his fresh viewpoint some escape might be seen. She had spoken of her father's daring speculations. Might it not be, he thought, that it was merely a matter of money? If that were all, his fortune would surely suffice. Enormous rentals had piled up during the ten years his father had been retired by his illness from the world of fashion. He himself had rarely spent his ample allowance, and next year most of the London ground rents fell due. Only the Dukes of Westminster and Bedford, the Grosvenors and the Russels, owned more of the valuable heart of the great city. If his father demurred there were plenty of money-lenders who would honour his paper, for nothing Lord St. Vian could do would break the entail.

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The train was late. He hurried along the cab ranks and picked out what he thought was the fastest horse. The reward for reaching the Red Star dock was sufficient to make the driver thread his way through narrow streets and broad boulevards at a pace which was reckless to onlookers, but deplorably slow to the impatient passenger.

The vessel was not at her customary dock, but lying out in the stream. He knew her instantly by the narrow white bands on her twin black funnels. The decks were crowded. Pushing his way through the crowds of curious onlookers he came upon the dock superintendent.

"When does she sail?" he demanded.

"Now," returned the official laconically. "Hear that bell? That's the signal for visitors to come ashore in the tender."

The man had in his hand some very powerful binoculars. When he perceived how badly the news seemed to affect his questioner he passed the glasses to him.

"Want to have a look?" he asked kindly.

Paget turned them onto the saloon deck where groups of men and women were bidding farewell one to another. Almost instantly Nina, dressed in the white serge costume he knew so well, came into focus. She seemed to be talking very ear-

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nestly to a tall man in blue, who wore one of the felt hats which stamped him to the European's eye as an American. So good were the lenses of the glasses that his face could be seen distinctly. There was action, everything but sound, and like nothing Paget could think of so much as a moving picture scene.

Suddenly he saw the girl hold both her hands to the man, who seemed to be speaking something of import. Then the man stooped down and kissed her and hurried out of vision. For some seconds Nina stood motionless and then slowly went below decks.

The superintendent sauntered up to Paget and demanded in jocular strain:

"Did you see her?"

Paget handed back the binoculars with a murmured thanks.

"Yes," he said in a strangely staccato voice, "I saw her."

The superintendent stared after him curiously as he walked, white-faced, from the dock.

"I wish I hadn't been so free with my glasses," he muttered.

For some hours Paget walked aimlessly about the Antwerp streets, torn with a complexity of emotions which left him finally physically weak.

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His will to trust her implicitly and believe that she was the loyal, true girl he had pictured underwent, as he fed his mind upon the scene of her farewell with the stranger, a change that might well be pardoned in a lover whose happiness had been torn from him and who had witnessed what he felt was unbelievable treachery. How little he knew her, he thought, and what incidents might there not be in her past life which rendered this scene but a logical sequence to affairs with other men! By degrees his passion of grief and anger subsided, and the words of her letter burnt into his brain brought to him a certain sense of shame. He had doubted her. He had shown himself to be of little faith.

He was conscious at last of bodily weakness and a mental fatigue that had never been his before. He found himself outside a restaurant in the Place de Meir; it was one of the cafés, outside which, in the summer, are little green tables and shrubs in barrels covered from sun and rain by awnings. He paused for a moment. The place seemed crowded, and he was in no mood for company. One table there seemed to be at which was seated only one man; to this he made his way and sat down heavily. His *vis-à-vis* was hawk-faced and dark, with high shoulders and eyes sunken in

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his head. He looked up with a trace of annoyance when he saw Paget, for he had chosen this untenanted corner for solitude's sake and welcomed no interruption. When he perceived that Paget paid no sort of attention to him, but seemed rather unconscious of his presence, he observed him more closely. He saw a tall, straight-featured man tanned by Indian suns to bronze, well dressed and obviously of the wealthy classes. And round the blue eyes he saw blank rings which might have marked a bout of dissipation. Jarvis Thorne was certain that his neighbour had been drinking and was now suffering from its effects. He watched him gulp his whisky-and-seltzer firm in the belief that here was a man determined to turn a bad day into a worst night.

Presently he turned to look at some other guests, when he felt that subconscious certainty that he was being stared at. It was with almost a shock that he beheld Paget leaning on his elbows, staring at him. With the irritation which is born of such a stare he spoke quickly.

"You seem very much interested in me."

"I have never been so much interested in a man as in you," he was told. He knew instantly from the clear, precise tone that the other had not been drinking. There was an evenness in this stranger's

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voice which showed that he had not spoken idly.

"Why?" snapped Thorne.

"One reason," said Paget, "is that I have never fought with a stronger inclination to reach over a table and strangle a man."

"You must be mad," said Thorne angrily.

"God!" cried Paget wearily, "I think I am or shall be."

Thorne looked at him perplexed. He had never seen the other before, and yet there could be no doubt that Paget thought he knew him. He made a motion to rise, but the other restrained him.

"Don't," said he. "I shan't do anything silly or violent. It was only for a moment I felt like that."

"See here," said Thorne, "you mean something of which I don't understand a particle. There's no doubt about your sincerity, but you're dead wrong. Now, honestly, who do you think I am?"

"You are the man who kissed her," said Paget.

Thorne flushed easily and he coughed harshly.

"What the devil do you mean?" he cried.

"I saw it all," said Paget. "She held out both her hands to you and then you kissed her."

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Thorne spoke very sternly.

"I resent your mention of such a thing," he said. "What happened when you were spying on the *Finland* was the most sacred moment of my life. Who are you?"

Paget's laugh had little joy in it.

"Until last night I was engaged to her," he said. "I followed her here to find out why she had to go to America, and I came in time to see you kiss her." There was no trace of anger in his voice now. That had passed away—he found himself wondering why.

"And you thought her disloyal to you?"

"I was engaged to her yesterday. She broke it off, and I saw a stranger kiss her." He asked almost entreatingly: "What am I to think?"

"Nina Lloyd," answered Thorne, "would never be disloyal to anyone. I met her by accident at luncheon to-day with her mother. We are very old friends, boy and girl friends, and I came to see her off. I asked her to kiss me and she of her kindness kissed me because within a few months I shall be dead. Are you going to think her disloyal because she kissed a poor devil who will be under the grass before Christmas? You needn't look incredulous," he said. "If you were a physi-

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cian I could convince you. It's tuberculosis in an advanced stage. Man, I shouldn't jest about death!"

"Were you ever engaged to her?" Paget demanded.

"Never," he said simply. "She wouldn't have me." He laughed a little bitterly. "God knows, I've asked her often enough. I never heard of her being engaged to anyone until she told me to-day why she was returning to New York."

"She told you that?" cried Paget eagerly.

Thorne answered very deliberately.

"She told me she was returning to marry Adolf Erbach—Erbach, the Wall Street magnate who has been cornering cotton."

Paget said nothing. Thorne saw him grip the rounded edges of the table with both hands.

"Poor devil!" he muttered.

"Wasn't her father speculating in cotton?" Paget asked presently.

"Erbach has squeezed him dry. Drought in Western Texas; shortage everywhere. Lloyd's firm will fail."

"She told you that?" demanded Paget.

"It's in the papers," said Thorne; "everyone knows it."

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"Why is she marrying him?" asked Paget, looking very hard at the man across the table.

The American hesitated for a moment. "I suppose Erbach will let up on her father," he answered.

Paget noted the slight pause, the first time that the man opposite had not answered instantly. It fitted in with the conviction he felt that the other had become possessed of the real reason, the reason he had hesitated to tell.

"There is something more than that," he said quietly. "You have known her a long while, you say?"

"Since she was ten and I was fourteen," he returned.

"Then you know she wasn't the girl to be frightened or coerced. And you know—no, how should you?—that she clung to the idea of happiness too fondly to want to lose it. She has not had a very happy life altogether, and we planned like children all the wonderful things we were going to do. I tell you this, which is a very sacred memory to me, because I want you to realise that there is much deeper meaning in it than you would make out. Would she," he cried passionately, "have talked about our future life as she did and written me the letter she did if she had

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been willing to throw it all up to save even her father's money? He was an old man; he had lived his life and ours was only beginning. Oh, I know you think it may be selfish to talk like this! But what would you do if you had had a glimpse of paradise and then lost it? Life owed us happiness."

The American moved uneasily in his seat. The terrible earnestness of the other man moved him more than he cared to admit.

"I don't see what I am to do," he said, a little lamely.

"You can tell me what she told you——" said Paget.

"What I heard was told to a dead man," returned the other. "She broke down. I was a sort of brother, she said, and there isn't a woman living, self-reliant as ever she may be, who doesn't need someone to tell her miseries to sometimes."

"Did she make any mention of me?" cried Paget.

"No," said Thorne, "but instinctively I knew there was another man, a man whom she loved." He frowned a little as though in doubt. "I wish I knew what was the best thing to do. What I heard was almost under seal of the confessional, as it were."

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'Listen to me," said Paget quietly. "Here are we, two men who love her and ought to be able to help her. I have lived, it seems to me, many lives to-night. There is nothing left of the mad, jealous beast that I was an hour ago. I only know that I must help her. There is always some way. I have a profession; I can break away from it to-morrow. I have money; it can be used to help her father if it is money he needs."

"It's more than that!" cried Thorne. "You are right in thinking that she told me all. Money is no good. I nearly broke down, too. I have always hated her mother, confound her! She gets off scot free while the girl pays." He covered his face with his hands and leaned for a minute on the little round table. When he looked up Paget could see the traces of tears. "I'm not very strong now," he said, almost apologetically; "and I haven't the control of myself I used to have when I rowed in the Harvard boat. When she told me all about it I broke down and cried like a child. She was being led to the slaughter by her mother. Heavens, what a mother! Here is the whole thing in a nutshell:

"Erbach has a hold over Mrs. Lloyd—letters and a damn fool diary written years ago—enough for a divorce. Old Lloyd—he must be nearly

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seventy—has a faith in his wife which is like a saint's reverence for God. If Nina doesn't bow beneath the yoke, the letters and diary will be published in New York. If Mr. Lloyd isn't indicted for killing Erbach he will die of a broken heart. Erbach knows the risk he is taking and Nina knows it, too. The Lloyds are originally from Charleston, and you've heard perhaps what Charleston pride is. You are on one side of the balance—and her father and her mother's honour on the other. Do you wonder they weigh you down?"

"She's right," he answered, simply bewildered at a series of events which offered no solution. And even in the moment of profound despondency his heart thrilled with the pride of loving and being loved by such a woman.

"The bridegroom's present will be a vanity box of gold containing just twenty letters and a little morocco-bound diary he gave her mother." Thorne laughed bitterly. "He knows that the Lloyds are too deeply attached to their faith to seek a divorce. One pays for one's church."

Thorne's temperature was rising and a flood of the irritability of the tubercular came over him.

"Can't you think of something?" he cried. "You're not a poor devil with less than a lung

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and a few months to live. If I were well and strong not hell itself should stop me from getting even with him!"

Paget glanced at him with some surprise. But when he noted the bright, febrile eye, the laboured breathing and the red over the cheekbone he said nothing.

"I thought there was nothing to be done," continued Thorne, "but you are right; we must help her. Can't you think of anything?" he asked appealingly.

Paget had always shown himself swift to think and act. There was forming in his mind a project which had a bare chance of success. No other offered itself. He was wise enough to know that no money could buy off a man with the passions of Adolf Erbach or his great wealth. He concentrated his mind on where within the last few days he had seen the name Erbach and learned something of him. Suddenly, the paragraph in the European edition of the *Daily Mail* spread itself before his mind as a page of writing may be thrown from a magic lantern upon a white sheet. "Mr. Adolph Erbach, after his successful fight for cotton control," he memorised, "is now in his yacht taking a short holiday in the Mediterranean."

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Paget was certain this was what he read. There were other particulars as to the magnificence of the vessel, of how it was fitted with wireless apparatus for the better transaction of business wherever the owner might be, which were still hazy; but he was convinced that it was of Erbach he had read.

"Listen to me," said Paget quietly. "This man is in Europe now?"

"I saw it in the *Herald*," answered Thorne. "He will get back in time for his wedding, though." He took the paper from his pocket and looked through the columns devoted to Americans abroad. "Yes, here it is," he said. "Mediterranean, Adriatic and the usual thing."

"Do you suppose he has got those letters with him?" demanded Paget.

"It's more than likely," said Thorne. "He has safes and secretaries and wireless aboard. In fact, he does all his business in summer from his yacht, the *Gay Heather*. Why?"

"Why shouldn't we get them?" asked Paget slowly.

Thorne looked at the other with a certain scorn. "Do you suppose that a man like Erbach would leave things lying around? Or, even if he did, could we disguise ourselves as able sea-

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men or even stewards and purloin them? And if we did, could we get away? It's a childish idea."

The thought of action in a measure dispelled Paget's gloom.

"Don't croak," he said. "Will you join me?"

A trifle ashamed of his petulance, Thorne held out his hand.

"In the forlornest of hopes or the most wild-cat schemes I am yours."

"Good!" cried Paget. "When can you come to London with me? By the early mail boat from Ostend to-morrow? It can't be the Harwich route because I must get my baggage from Bruges."

"Any time you say," said Thorne, "and anywhere." His spirits were rising.

Paget consulted a time-table.

"Your train leaves here to-morrow morning at half-past five. I can just catch a train to Bruges now. Will you meet me on the quay at Ostend to-morrow?"

"I won't fail," said Thorne.

Paget addressed him eagerly. "If we fail to carry out the scheme that's simmering in my head, it will be because luck is against us."

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Thorne beheld him hail a passing cab and drive away in a species of bewilderment. Life owed him, so physicians told him, only a few months of existence. He was well off, without near relatives, and was purposing to pass what days should be his in the snows of the Alps. It was a plan easily altered. He would follow, instead, the only man he had ever envied and see whether the two of them might not accomplish something for Nina Lloyd.

Embittered by the imminence of his doom, hopelessly in love with a girl who could offer him no more than her friendship, Jarvis Thorne had been only two days in Europe when he beheld her, newly come from Bruges, driving with Mrs. Lloyd to their hotel, which was also his. It was a rare tribute to her uncommon nature that the men who had loved her remained always her loyal friends. And, although his heart leaped when he saw her, Thorne forbore to make his presence known. What good would it do, he thought, to inflict the society of a dying man, harassed continually with a distressing cough, upon one who had known him only in perfect health and strength? But she had seen him in the corridor and had been immeasurably shocked at his appearance. There had seemed no treachery to her family in con-

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fessing the real reason of her sacrifice to him. The look of scorn which had flickered in his eyes when, before her explanation, she spoke of her coming marriage with Erbach hurt her more than she cared to admit. He could give her but cold comfort, yet she felt the more tranquil that she had unbosomed herself.

The excitement of the day brought Thorne a wretched night. He slept badly, coughing incessantly, and was white and worn when he joined Paget on the Ostend wharf. For the time he was content to lie back in a deck chair with eyes closed. Paget was alarmed at his look of illness. The tubercular patient, for the reason that his disease is not so readily apparent to the layman, rarely receives the sympathy that is accorded to manifestations of less serious conditions. They were in sight of Dover Castle before he betrayed any animation. Then, the rest having revived him, he sat up more cheerfully. Paget set himself to broach his scheme.

"Do you know anything about yachting?" he asked. "Or yachts?"

"My father was once commodore of the New York Yacht Club," said the other, "and ever since I was a kid I have tinkered with marine en-

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gines." He smiled more cheerfully. "I took out a patent condenser when I was fifteen. It made no money because it wouldn't live up to its promises, but it shows you my good intentions. Why?"

Paget passed him a copy of the *Field*. "Look at that advertisement—the one with the photograph."

Thorne looked at it closely.

"Seems a nice boat," he commented. "Turbines of the Parsons type, built last year and can make eighteen knots. What about it?"

"I must," said Paget, "run down to my home for two days. When I come back I want to find the yacht all ready for us. It says it is ready to put in commission. I wired from Bruges that I would take it providing it was satisfactory. Will you attend to it for me?"

"It will cost a whole lot of money," said the American.

Paget hesitated a moment.

"I don't want to seem to be offensive," he hazarded, "but I will leave you enough money to carry out this plan. It's my picnic, you must remember."

Thorne grinned cheerfully.

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"We'll see about that," he said. "I'll have her ready if she's any good. But suppose she isn't!"

"There are others," said Paget. "The bad season has hit lots of the yachtsmen and the mud berths at Southampton are full of good boats."

"We are going after Erbach, then?" demanded Thorne.

Paget nodded.

"I have his complete itinerary here. I wired to the Paris *Herald* last night. It seems the beast combines business with pleasure in whatever he does, and is reported to be forming a sulphur combine in Sicily. I hadn't a faint idea there was any sulphur in the land where Theocritus used to sing, but the *Herald* says there is." He paused for a minute. "Did she," he asked a little nervously, "tell you when the marriage was to take place?"

"In September," Thorne told him. "There's plenty of time, old man. Are the details of this scheme fixed up yet?"

"Only the main idea is sketched out. I have a tremendous train journey to and from my home, and by the time I join you at Southampton, I hope to have it all worked out. It's a bit risky,"

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he added. "I'm not sure if you ought to embark blindly without knowing all about it."

"Forget it!" laughed Thorne. "I am without ties. If I am disgraced I shall glory in it and die like a blessed little hero. I've always envied the boy who stood on the burning deck and was frazzled to slow music. Have you any people to disgrace?"

Paget betrayed a certain uneasiness. There would be a fight with Lord St. Vian, he feared, but whatever his father might say would not be sufficient to dissuade him from making the attempt he had determined upon.

In the course of the long journey from Paddington to the West of England, he could think of no excuses to put before the Earl which logically promised success. He was aware that his own inner feelings as to the probable outcome would have little force when pitted against the Earl's questioning. His father was warned by telegram of his coming and passed the wire over to Dr. Bagot, his resident physician.

The doctor read it and handed it back.

"I am glad," was all he permitted himself to say.

"You fear you are going to lose your patient?" asked the Earl.

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"I could wish you were stronger," answered the other.

"What tact you possess!" said His Lordship, smiling with a suspicion of weariness. "But I like the truth better when it applies to me."

"I think it is just as well that Lord Mountcastle remain at home for a while," returned Dr. Bagot.

"Say nothing to him about my condition," warned the Earl. "I will tell him what I think fit. We are old, Bagot, and have had our fun, and mustn't ask the young to watch us pay for it." He sighed. "I shall be glad to have the boy back again, though."

Lord St. Vian listened without comment to the long and involved story which his son told him. There was something in it which appealed to a latent sense of romance in him. Here were two young knights-errant setting out in fifteenth-century style to fight for their lady. As in Dürer's masterpiece, Death rode by the side of one knight. He was silent for a long while after Mountcastle had finished. Aware that his health was in a very poor state, he had waited impatiently for his son to return home on a long leave from his regiment. Then when the engagement with Mildred Heronhurst was broken off he had cheerfully con-

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sented to let him travel and find some sort of solace, hoping that in a little while he would come back to the castle.

In his early life Lord St. Vian had been one of the picturesque peers of the mid-Victorian epoch. None of the aristocracy had aroused greater heart-burning in the ruffled minds of radical reformers than he. He was invested with a reputation for dare-deviltry that was not wholly warranted; but his love of high play, and the fact that he was twice an owner of a Derby winner and had won the Grand Military thrice, and had never made any pretensions to even the mildest kind of righteousness, had filled the great Nonconformist conscience of his country with the bitterest prejudice against him. During his ten years of illness he had had leisure to reflect that the reputation he had won was not one of which he need be proud. He made no excuses to anyone, because he felt that the Trevenoses needed to make none, but he asked himself every day what kind of a man he would have been if he had married the woman whose miniature he treasured.

And while Mountcastle waited eagerly for what his father might say, his father was filled with a memory which softened his heart and banished

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the objections that had arisen during his son's narrative.

At last he smiled kindly at the younger man. "Do as you like," he said. "No one will welcome her more truly than I."

When Dr. Bagot learned that Mountcastle was setting off for a long yachting cruise he evinced some distress.

"Have you told him," he asked the Earl, "that your health is in such a precarious condition that he may never see you again?"

"My dear Bagot," cried the other a little impatiently, "I am taking the risk and Mountcastle is not to know anything about it. There are very special reasons why he must go now. I should merit perdition if I tried to stop him. Ah, Bagot," he sighed, "I wish age sat more gracefully upon me! Don't you remember when there was youth and springtime in your blood, too?"

The old physician shook his head.

"That was a long while ago," he said slowly.

"I think of it still," said the Earl; "and that's one of the reasons I won't have the lad dissuaded."

"I don't understand," cried the other.

"God never gave you youth," said Lord St. Vian pityingly.

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## CHAPTER THIRTEEN

### THE CHASE

WHEN Mountcastle stepped from the train at Southampton he found Jarvis Thorne waiting for him. It seemed hardly possible to believe that this cheerful-looking man with clear eyes and skin was the one he had left so deadly ill a few days before. It had been easy enough then to judge him the victim of tuberculosis, but a complete transformation led Mountcastle to hope that the young American, who had come so strangely into his life and who would be intimately associated with him in a common quest, might, after all, be wrong. Vaguely uneasy, as are most healthy men in the presence of disease, he told himself that the sea voyage would set his friend up, and that there would be a happy issue out of their adventure.

Thorne wrung his hand heartily.

"Whether it was inspiration or intuition or sheer dumb luck," he commenced, "that made you pick out the *Sea-born*, I don't know, but she's the dandiest yacht I've ever been aboard."

"Then you got her?" demanded the other.



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"She's ours," answered Thorne. "I've a picked crew and coal-bunkers full of the best Welsh coal, and our papers are all made out."

"That's pretty quick work, isn't it?" said Mountcastle.

"The record for the port," said Thorne cheerfully. "I sat on the bridge at midnight, and had the men coaling all through the night to the cheerful strains of a phonograph. None of your dreamy, plaintive airs, either, but marches and quick music. I wish I could patent the idea—there's money in it. Let's go aboard at once."

When the hansom came in sight of the harbour, Thorne pointed the yacht to his co-owner with an honest enthusiasm that was contagious.

"There isn't a boat here," he said, "that can touch her in speed or looks."

And indeed the *Sea-born*, built on the Clyde to the order of a celebrated yachtsman, had beautiful lines and a speed that was possessed by no other boat of her tonnage. And it was the fact of so much of her space being taken up with engine-rooms and coal-bunkers to the seclusion of passenger accommodation that made her difficult to sell. She was a costly boat to keep in commission.

Mountcastle looked about him with delight.

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"I don't see how you managed to do everything so quickly," he said at length. "The coaling's all over, and the men look as though they'd lived here for years."

"I always hire men on their looks," his friend answered. "I don't care a rap for references. The skipper asked me for a mate's job—I made him captain instead. He lost his reputation hereabouts because he discovered an uncharted reef of rocks on his last voyage—ripped the bottom out of his ship in doing it. He brought two men with him—two satellites who will follow him anywhere. They were in low water, too. The Trevicks—twin brothers."

He insisted on showing everything to Mountcastle and dilated with particular pride on the turbines. During dinner he read a list of the ages, names and weights of every man aboard, together with a résumé of their past experiences.

"I don't know what your plans are," he said finally, "but I know there's to be some danger in carrying them out. I selected Captain Penfold and his two followers and let them get the men we wanted. If I approved of them I kept them; if I didn't, they weren't hired. You'll notice that there aren't any very young men aboard. Most of them are quiet men who save

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their money and are not likely to talk too much. There's a craze on yachts now for smart young men; and fellows over thirty-five stand very little chance. These men here are tickled to death at the job, and just as grateful to me as can be."

"That's valuable," said Paget thoughtfully. "You've done astonishingly well, Thorne. You've been so confoundedly quick, too."

"It's something to live for," answered the American. "Lord, man, when I saw you in Antwerp, I felt my life couldn't be ended too quick. I wasn't any use to anybody except an undertaker. Now I shall be able to do something. I never could sit still and contemplate distance like a happy cow. I'm either not stupid enough to do so, or else I'm too stupid. My friends have one version and my foes another."

"There'll be more than contemplation," retorted Paget, "if we have any luck at all."

"And if we fail?" demanded Thorne.

"Dungeon cells and uncomfortable things like that," answered Paget, eyeing the other narrowly. "You've thought of that alternative?"

"I should think I had!" cried Thorne, with an undimmed air of content. "I picked my crew with every intention to avoid it. Now, how about details—you have them fixed?"

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"When we are fairly started, you shall hear them. By Jove! We're under way already! We shall be off Nutley in a few minutes."

And, indeed, the *Sea-born*, her smoothly running turbines in motion, was steaming down Southampton water on her way to the open sea, bound on an errand which was frankly not in accordance with the law as it is laid down in statute books.

Thorne listened silently while Paget unfolded his plans.

"Fine!" he exclaimed when the other had finished. "But you haven't thought of one or two things—such as——"

"Yes?"

"Well, you haven't thought of the possible effect on Wall Street, the London Stock Exchange and the Paris Bourse."

"They must look after themselves," said Paget briefly. "What then?"

"You have drawn a picture with big sweeping strokes. There are lots of little things to fill in —details and such—and they count."

Paget looked at him ruefully.

"Surely you don't think it impossible?"

"Oh, we'll go through with it!" cried Thorne. "And win out, too! I've no use for cinches—I

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suppose I'm a bit of a gambler in my way—odds on favourites never appealed to me in anything."

Since it was no part of the plan of the owners to allow anyone to suspect their quest of Erbach's yacht, they were forced to admit the task was more difficult than they had anticipated. At every port of call they found the European edition of the *Herald* and the Paris edition of the *Mail* awaiting them, and were thus able to find approximately what course had been taken by the millionaire. Apparently Erbach had no fixed route, but cruised indiscriminately. But Thorne, with his intimate knowledge of the man and the immensity of his interests, held that each one of these little voyages was premeditated. It was certain, however, that the papers of New York took a contrary view. Erbach was a splendid example, they held, of a financier who was not hustling to early death. Even the *Medical Record* made him the subject of an enthralling editorial on the prevalence of arteriac sclerosis among Wall Street men, and the wisdom he had shown in preparing himself, when the time came, for Euthanasia.

They had been three weeks looking for the *Gay Heather* when it was reported to them that she was at Marseilles. Hither they sped with all

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haste. As they came in sight of the Château d'If and Frioul, a thick fog settled down, rendering it difficult for the yacht to enter the harbour and find an anchorage. It was finally accomplished without mishap, and at once Thorne ordered up the yacht's launch for a tour of inspection. Slowly the little boat picked her way in and out among the ships, her occupants making out, from time to time, the names of the yachts as they passed under their sterns. On none of them, however, was to be seen the one so eagerly desired, and they were about to give it up and return when suddenly there came a sharp hail. Immediately Thorne ordered the engines reversed, while again, nearer than before, came the voice across the fog-girt water. It was an English voice, there was no mistaking the words of warning, and it was followed by blasts from whistle and fog-horn.

"She's right on us!" yelled Paget. "They'll run over us!"

The launch now shrieked continuously its warning notes, while the men, alarmed and helpless, listened to the churning and splashing of the water, which became louder and louder. And as they sat, expecting to be struck at any moment, the launch bobbing up and down like a cork, there came out of the fog, seemingly a part of it,

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though swiftly taking shape, a craft of considerable size, which grew larger and larger, apparently, as she bore down upon them.

Somewhere at the back of the mind each man knew the danger and realised that it was merely a toss of a coin whether they should live or die; nevertheless, in the quick look that passed between them each read in the other's eyes a promise, if spared, not to quit until his task had been accomplished. And hardly had this unspoken pledge been given when a great white yacht, swerving a little from her course at the critical moment, rushed by, missing the launch by a scant ten yards, and in an incredibly short space of time, so it seemed, her hull had faded away and was lost.

But though neither of the two friends had made out her name, Paget had caught sight of her flag.

"A Frenchman!" he cried. "One can't mistake the tri-colour."

And such is the disposition of man to forget quickly, once a danger is passed, that the disappointed friends vented their wrath not on the outgoing stranger that was speeding so recklessly in such weather and had nearly cut them in two, but on the yachting correspondents of the American *Herald* and English *Mail* for misleading them.

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But these intelligencers in no wise merited such censure. Erbach, who in his less busy moments loved female society of a certain class, had found in the French port a dancer not unknown to New York roof gardens. She was on her way to Nice, —her home,—and accepted his proposal to take her there by sea. It was in her honour that the tri-colour was flying; and it was her desire—for the moment a law unto Erbach—for haste that was responsible for the speed which the *Gay Heather* developed when steaming out of the port.

Such disappointments had a perceptible effect on Thorne's health. Paget was thus doubly worried. He blamed himself for not having some physician on board, and was more than delighted when Thorne started from the dinner-table, one evening, declaring that he had an idea whereby turbine engines could have their cost halved, their efficiency doubled and their bulk diminished by an invention which had suddenly struck him.

For a week or so he spent most of his time with the chief engineer, who made blue prints for him. The idea, half-fantastic, as its author admitted, was to heat the engine boilers with hydrogen gas, and thus do away with coal. Hydrogen's great calorific power would thus accomplish the end easily. He was not daunted by the sceptical en-

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gineer's reminder of the great danger of explosion. He would overcome it, he said, and die a world-benefactor.

He was full of this scheme when the *Sea-born*, still following the leads of the papers, after a fruitless call at Trieste, pushed her way down the Adriatic and put in at Otranto for coal.

There were three yachts there, and to Thorne one of them looked very much like the *Gay Heather*. They had hardly anchored when the motor-launch was lowered and they made their way to her. True enough, there, gold-emblazoned on the stern, was the name they had sought so long! But once more they were doomed to disappointment: for even as they were gazing at her, her anchors were pulled up and calmly, insolently, unconsciously, she set out on another journey.

Thorne's face was flushed with excitement and his eyes sparkled.

"All right, my lady in white!" he cried. "We can follow you this time." But, to his amazement, he saw no answering enthusiasm on Paget's face; on the contrary, never had he seen his companion look so hopeless. "Cheer up, Paget!" he said. "Remember we can make eighteen knots; and she can only do fifteen at forced draught."

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Paget deliberately lighted a cigarette before answering.

"I'm not an engineer; so I'll ask you how many knots will ten tons of coal take us?"

Thorne's face fell.

"I forgot all about it," he said gloomily.

"Buck up!" cried Paget, assuming an air of lightness. "We can try your patent phonograph coaling scheme, and get our friend, after all. We can start coaling within an hour; and the harbour-master will tell us where he's bound."

. . . . .

While these adventurers sped on their voyage, Nina Lloyd, surrounded by the gaieties that go to make Bar Harbor such a delightful summer resort, had the hardest task. Essentially a girl who, whatever she tolerated in others, demanded of herself perfect honesty and truth, she felt abased when she was compelled to listen to the congratulations offered to her on her forthcoming marriage with Adolf Erbach. She was told that she was making a brilliant match, an advantageous match, an ambitious match, but no one ever hinted to her that she was making a love match. There were in Maine, at this time, two girls whose friendship she valued; girls not wholly frivolous, but still of the same rich, socially secure set that she moved

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in. It seemed that they now regarded her in a different light; the confidences they had formerly given her were withheld. With the majority, it was different. Most of her girl friends were envious of her marriage with such a man as Erbach. Their congratulations wearied her. The two for whose sympathy she longed in vain, held aloof. To them Nina had fallen a victim to an ignoble ambition. Almost they regarded her as one already dead.

And no part of her ordeal was harder than the letters written by her father. He, poor gentleman, immersed in the impending downfall which threatened him and his fortune, begged that she would choose a worthier man. He told her of the high hopes that he cherished for his only child, and the bitter disappointment Mrs. Lloyd's letter, announcing the engagement, had been to him.

For the better furtherance of her desires, Mrs. Lloyd and her daughter were passing the summer season together. To the elder woman Nina showed the communication.

"What answer is there to this?" she asked.

Mrs. Lloyd read it through carelessly.

"Surely," she answered, "you can easily remind your father that the sentiment which might have been popular before the war has no place

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in our world." She handed it back with a scornful smile. "It is for you to judge," she said meaningly, "whether he is the worse wounded through you or through me."

The girl wrote a brilliantly witty letter to Colonel Lloyd, in which she told him that her love of power was greater than her desire for romance, and that he had endowed her with qualities that were not hers. She was a child of the age, she said, and no one believed in love at first sight.

The girl knew when she sent it that the letter would wound him. Yet she felt she must do this lest he suspect the truth, and get a deadlier hurt.

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## CHAPTER FOURTEEN

### THE RUSE

"WELL, we have got her at last! She won't get away from us easily!"

This exclamation came from John Paget. For a day and a night the two friends on the steam yacht *Sea-born*—jointly owned by Jarvis Thorne of New York and John Paget of London, as their papers read—had looked, from a little house rigged up on the after deck for the accommodation of Thorne, at the Sicilian capital. Lying across the harbour by the Porto Salvo was Adolf Erbach's great steam yacht, the *Gay Heather*. They had had a long chase to come up with her; from port to port she had gone in a way that almost baffled them; but on a brilliant night in July the *Sea-born* had steamed into La Cala at Palermo and dropped anchor within hailing distance. There were many indications that the *Gay Heather* was in no hurry to proceed.

"Do you think the men know their part?" Thorne demanded presently.

"Letter perfect!" cried Paget, laughing.



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"Those two cronies of the skipper are simply great! Bill Trevick has a gift for high comedy. His reminiscences sound like Jacob's stories. The other—the silent twin—has been variously captain of the Salvation Army, a prize-fighter, a saloon-keeper, and acts under brother Bill's instructions."

"How long will it take us to find out all particulars as to Erbach's men and his habits while aboard?" Thorne asked.

"Bill Trevick starts to-morrow morning," said the other. "He says with simple, manly confidence, that with his native wit and a box of my cigars if he cannot find out everything about the *Gay Heather*, that he will live his other life in Purgatory." Paget seemed in excellent spirits. "I've got faith in Trevick." And looking at his watch, he added: "It's time you turned in, old chap! We may need all your energy before long."

"I hope to heaven we do!" cried Thorne. "I feel as nervous as a cat to-night, knowing how near we are to our friend in the *Gay Heather*." He took his companion's hand, for a deep friendship had sprung up between the two men of different nationalities bound together by a common quest, and made himself ready for slumber.

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It was early in the morning when William Trevick of Falmouth, quarter-master of the *Sea-born*, rowed leisurely across the harbour and up to the *Gay Heather*. Several men were smoking and looking overboard.

"Is Joe Rook of Plymouth aboard, my hearties?" he sung out.

One man removed his pipe from its resting place and spat leisurely.

"He left us at Malta," he answered.

"Left!" cried Trevick, "Why?"

"Couldn't help it," returned the other. "He died. No friend, I hope?"

"Only my brother-in-law," faltered Trevick. "Poor old Joe!"

"Why, I'm sorry to hear that," said the other sailor sympathetically.

Trevick rested on his oars, a picture of misery.

"If any of you could tell me about it, I'd be grateful," he said at length. "My old woman would like to know; Joe was always the favourite brother."

"The only one, too," said a *Gay Heather* man, "if Joe spoke the truth."

"The only one," assented Trevick easily. "The rest was all drowned young."

"Come aboard!" cried several of the men.

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Slowly, the quarter-master, still suffering from the shock the news had given him, clambered onto the white decks and listened to many versions of the lamentable death of Joseph Rook. It was while pursuing his inquiries at one of the ports as to the whereabouts of the *Gay Heather*, that he had learned from a friend of the death through drowning of one of Erbach's crew. To use it to his own advantage was not difficult to a man of his natural abilities. Sailormen dearly love to talk of death and omens; and their comrade's fatal accident occurring on the same day as had been signalised by the appearance of a black cat on the companion hatchway seemed of special import to them. They smoked with relish the box of cigars which the unblushing stranger asserted were intended as a present to his deceased brother-in-law, and gave their ingenious theories in turn.

Rarely, admitted the *Gay Heather* men, had they met a fairer and squarer follower of the sea than Joe Rook's brother-in-law. He was pressed to come again; and the simple soul, remarking that it would ease his heart to talk of Joe with such likely lads, promised to return that evening.

The Sicilians, although not ethically in ad-

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vance of other European people, pay a more profound respect to the external rites of their religion, as seen in solemn procession on holy days, than is consistent with their mode of life. There are a great number of days in the year set aside for religious processions and general holidays. Paget had learned that one of the most important was at hand. He knew also that such sights invariably drew most of the foreign visitors and, as many of the yachts' crews as could be spared. He waited for Trevick's return with some impatience. A consultation was held in Thorne's little deck-house, and full discretion was given to the quarter-master to call upon any supplies he might need for his purpose.

In the evening Trevick took his brother with him. John Trevick was a silent man, but esteemed mightily on account of his great physical strength. At his brother's command he would arise solemnly and lift weights that other men could not move. This rarely failed to arouse an admiration among men of his class; and combined with the simple suavity of Bill's manner, carried them into unwonted popularity. Bill allowed it to be known that his owners were kind and generous and had assented to their crew going to the great procession on Friday, laden with provision for a day's

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outing. The *Gay Heather* men responded that they had shore leave, but were not so liberally treated in the way of liquors and tobacco.

The brothers Trevick, therefore, in the name of the *Sea-born's* men, invited them to become their guests, and did not leave until all details were settled. Silent John paid one of his rare compliments as they rowed back to the *Sea-born.*

"There's few," said he, "can stand along of you in depth." It was but rarely that they stooped to social amenities.

On Friday morning the brothers Trevick introduced the two crews. With the freemasonry of British and American sailors, they were soon arm in arm and patrolled the streets of Palermo together. The Capella Palatina, perhaps the most perfect building of its kind in the world, won but scanty praise from them; the Cathedral had the effect merely of awakening a deeper thirst; and at the Museo Nazionale they declined any further sight-seeing. They would have agreed with Robert Louis Stevenson, had they known him, that sight-seeing is the art of disappointment. It was while they were in this state that Bill Trevick made his carefully planned suggestion.

"Look here, sonnies," he said, "we are all very warm and very dry. Now I propose we go to

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some little village outside the city and get cool and have something to drink."

"Not a step further!" said a *Gay Heather* man firmly. "I ain't used to it."

"When you're our guests," retorted Trevick with dignity, "you don't have to walk. Now, my brother here,"—he indicated him who once leaped over the bar of a sailor's saloon on the Portsmouth "Hard,"—"knows a nice little place about four miles from here. What's the name, Jack?"

"Molara," replied Jack stolidly. He had been in dire fear lest he should forget any part of his lesson.

"Ain't this good enough?" demanded one of Erbach's men, pointing to a near-by tavern.

"The excise won't let us drink our liquor here," Bill replied in a drastic manner. "They'd pinch us. Up in Molara it would be all right. Of course," he added with elaborate sarcasm, "if you prefer this dago liquor you can stop here, but our stuff is all ready awaiting for us at Molara."

An hour's drive took them to the village, and with cigars and other refreshments they abandoned themselves to a joviality which was guarded carefully from degenerating into quarrelsomeness by the sheer size and known muscular ability of the

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silent Trevick, and aided by the diplomacy of his brother.

At a time indicated by Bill, John proposed to make a punch for his guests, which should make the day memorable. He named it *Gay Heather* Punch. At a later date the *Gay Heather* men were singularly sensitive to ridicule on this subject. To ask if they liked punch was to invite a fight. The first brew sufficed merely for the guests. A second was needed for the *Sea-born's* crew. When it was consumed and brotherly feeling ran high, Bill Trevick withdrew unobserved and took his solitary way back to Palermo. As night drew on, all the men, with the exception of Jack Trevick, were sunk in slumber. But to the practised eye there was a difference. Whereas the *Sea-born* men were suffering merely from an over-indulgence of food and drink which induced sleep, their guests were doped in the manner crimps prepare their baits for men who are to be shipped aboard short-handed vessels, to awake with throbbing heads, far from the sight of shore.

The proprietor of the inn, well paid for his services, helped Trevick lift the drugged sailors into a cow-house. The others were hoisted into a wagon and driven at a walk to the city, their conductor regarding his work with the pride of

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a master. Not a *Gay Heather* man would stir till daybreak, he knew.

Trevick reported himself to his owners directly he came aboard and gave a cheering account of his day's doings. The two men listened intently.

"What men are left on the *Gay Heather?*" Thorne demanded.

"Mr. Erbach and the wireless operator, whose name I don't remember," returned Trevick, consulting a piece of pencilled paper. "Mr. Harris, the secretary, is ashore with the officers, who have leave to attend the ball. There's a steward, a sailor and two greasers. I've fixed them up with a bottle, and if they do show above deck, they're far enough forrard not to notice us."

"But, are only five men left?" asked Paget, doubting that so relatively small a number would be left on the great yacht.

"Some of the men at Molara only have shore leave till eight o'clock. When they come back, there's six of the men now aboard the *Gay Heather* will go ashore." Trevick grinned knowingly. "The officers is away, and they won't spoil their fun by waiting, and Mr. Erbach he leaves it all to the skipper. Leaving out the greasers, there's only the wireless man and the other two."

Paget looked at him keenly.

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"I suppose you have guessed that we are going to do something for which we shall have to pay if we fail."

"I can pay," said Trevick without emotion. Neither he nor his brother had forgotten that they were in sore straits when, with the skipper, Thorne had picked them up on the Southampton docks. Few men are more loyal to their employers than are sailors when well treated.

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## CHAPTER FIFTEEN

### THE MULTI-MILLIONAIRE

About half an hour later, a boat containing Paget, Thorne and Captain Penfold drew alongside the great yacht which loomed huge and mysterious in the dark night. No one barred their approach or seemed aware that they had gained the deck. At the entrance to the main saloon aft a steward met them. Erbach received few visitors, and no newspaper men, so the servant experienced some alarm lest he should be blamed for not preventing their boarding the vessel. He had been sleeping.

"Is Mr. Erbach aboard?" demanded Thorne.

"Have you an appointment?" asked the man. "Mr. Erbach receives no one without appointments."

"He will see me," retorted the American. "Tell him I must have his signature to an important document."

Erbach received the message impatiently. He was sitting at a table poring over a huge railroad map. Within a day or so he knew the American



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consul was to call relative to a business matter, but that he should choose ten o'clock at night struck him as unreasonable. He hesitated for a moment. "Send him in," he snapped.

Paget followed his friend into the cabin, which was fitted up in much the same rococo style which distinguished Erbach's Fifth Avenue home. A safe built into a partition, a secretary's desk with a typewriter upon it and the map occupying almost the whole of the table at which he sat gave a business-like appearance to the apartment.

Paget fastened his eyes on the other eagerly. Erbach was a man of middle size, but enormously broad, with a big head and a bull neck. His features were bold, his mouth large and cruel and his small, dark eyes were famed for the effect they produced upon those who tried to cross swords with him. He was well dressed in a suit of blue serge, and a single diamond blazed upon the little finger of a hand whose size should not have been accentuated. In every aspect of the man conscious power was written. He had battled with the big men, and if he had not beaten them he had compelled them to take him into their councils. One of the boldest of stock gamblers, he had years ago, when he was merely a small gambler making a living by "scalping" small fluctuations in

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prices, set himself to attain eminence in this field of his chosen endeavour. When a great speculator manipulated market prices in the Sugar and Gas "pools" Erbach was close enough to him to profit. And when, at the whisper of the man he admired, Northern Pacific stock went up to a thousand dollars a share in a day, Erbach was not one of those who lost.

But for five or six years now he had not needed to ally himself with anyone except as an equal. His adventures into the corn and cotton markets had made him feared by the biggest of them. Unknown to any but his secret agents, he was at the present moment, while apparently engaged in making a trip in his yacht, endeavouring to put through a great railway deal which would mean more than any of his past triumphs. He and Harriman had commenced business in very much the same way, and he was not too ambitious to see himself bracketed some day with the two great railroad men of his country. Then would come the greatest struggle of all. Well, he was the youngest of them, had the best health and could see no weakness through which they could penetrate his financial armour. It was while he was making his plans for this Napoleonic enterprise that Thorne's message interrupted him.

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Neither Paget nor Thorne felt any desire to speak. They gazed at the man they had tracked so long, with a silent contentment that was construed by the other into the natural respect or diffidence a consulate clerk would have in his presence.

"Well?" he ejaculated, raising his eyes.

There was no answer.

"You are from the consul, I suppose?" he demanded.

"No," Thorne answered.

Erbach's manner became a little less brusque.

"You've come about that subscription to the Sailors' Hospital? I will send a cheque to Mr. Brand. You'll forgive me if I am too busy just now to talk, won't you?"

"I never heard of Mr. Brand or his hospital," returned Thorne slowly.

Erbach looked up more searchingly.

"Are you newspaper men?"

Again Thorne shook his head.

"Your manner is very strange," cried Erbach.

"Our errand is stranger," retorted Thorne.

"What is it, then?" the other snapped.

"You are engaged to be married to Miss Lloyd," he began.

"My private affairs don't concern you."

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"On the contrary, more than you think," returned Thorne, with a show of politeness. "You won her consent by holding over her head the letters written to you by her mother, together with the diary she kept during a yachting trip and sent to you. With true chivalry you sent her a specimen page, demanding her daughter as the price of its sale to a New York paper."

"I utterly decline to listen to you," shouted Erbach. "I'll have you thrown off my boat."

But he found Paget standing directly before the electric bell. For a moment he stared at him in silence. The stranger was holding himself in such a position that Erbach knew instinctively there would be a struggle if he tried to advance. Never a physical coward—indeed, it was one of his oft-repeated boasts that he never had and never would carry a gun, preferring rather his fists—he knew that two men against one was no fair match.

"I wouldn't if I were you," said Paget calmly.

Erbach scowled at the speaker and sat down again heavily.

"You hope to marry Miss Lloyd in September," said Thorne evenly.

"I shall marry her in September," corrected Erbach emphatically.

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"You know, of course, that she loathes you," said the young American.

Erbach's face, as he fought down his inclination to attack the speaker, was not pretty to see. With Thorne in front of the door and Paget guarding the bell there was forced upon him the unwilling knowledge that he must listen to what these men chose to say. As to the ultimate outcome of it there could only be a triumph for him, but he brooked opposition ill.

"What do you want?" he demanded. "Money?"

Thorne waved his arm impatiently.

"We are determined that you shall not marry Miss Lloyd," he cried.

Erbach laughed.

"I see," he said with a sneer; "you two good young men will publish my infamy and rescue the girl. I am to be the villain and you two the heroes. You are rivals, I take it."

"Yes," said Thorne cheerfully; "you've got that part of it right."

Erbach leaned back and laughed. "My part is to listen with bowed head and give up, eh? And to live up to the moral stories, I should spend the remainder of my life in charities. Poor heroes," he sneered; "what a disappointment!"

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"You can cut that foolery out!" cried Thorne. "Do you suppose that we don't know you from A to Z? And knowing you, do you suppose we think there's any decency in you? It seems to me, Adolf, that you aren't showing your accustomed judgment. We are here to get some letters and a diary; they're in that safe there."

Erbach looked around hastily; it seemed as though he feared that it was open. No gesture could have betrayed the truth of Thorne's random shot more completely.

"It's a lie!" he cried. "And if they were there, you'd never get them."

Paget advanced toward him and leaned easily over the big table. "Look here," he said, "why not drop this fool attitude of yours? Aren't you clever enough to understand that you're cornered? We've been planning this interview for nearly two months. If money talks to you more than anything else, I may tell you that it has cost us as nearly as possible a quarter of a million dollars to be in a position to board your craft and dictate terms to you. We're here. Just because we don't flourish revolvers or stilettos or make melodramatic threats doesn't prove we are not dangerous to you."

Erbach looked at the speaker sullenly. Cool-

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ness in emergencies and lack of excitement, qualities which were not naturally his, had been cultivated with great assiduity. They were attributes which impressed him tremendously in others. He noted them in the two young men who had forced themselves so strangely into his presence. There was no trace of nervousness in either of them. They reminded him of the easy bearing of the stage burglar he had seen in a dramatised novel. There were no furtive glances to doors or hurried movements. To insure such carelessness they must have laid their plans as cleverly as he did when he set out to ruin business rivals. For an instant he felt he was beaten; but he was by nature aggressive, and he stared back into Paget's face with renewed hostility.

"We are just as determined," said the Englishman, "as though we were picturesque bandits from the Sicilian hills, or Western desperadoes. I wouldn't lose sight of that if I were you."

To one who knew him there might have been recognised a fleeting look of triumph on the financier's face. He seemed to be pondering the matter deeply when, without warning, he overset his chair in a bound for the bell, from which Paget had moved. He placed his finger upon the knob.

"For determined and dangerous men who spend

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money so recklessly," he sneered, "you are pretty amateurish. This is what beats you."

As he pressed the button the tinkle of the bell was heard at the end of the corridor. With his back to the wall Erbach put himself in the posture of defence.

"Most of my men are ashore," he cried; "but there are enough on board to give you two heroes a good time that you'll remember."

He was puzzled and vaguely uneasy that his action did not seem to concern his auditors. Paget lighted a cigarette and Thorne even moved from the door and sank wearily into a seat. Erbach listened eagerly, and his face brightened when the footsteps of deliverance were heard. As they approached the door he shouted:

"Don't open! There are thieves here! Get the boys together quick!"

Despite his warning a tall, middle-aged sailor entered and looked inquiringly at Thorne, who was nearest to him.

"What about the two men in the engine-room?" Thorne demanded.

"Drunk," said Trevick concisely.

"Where is the wireless operator?"

"Asleep in his berth," said the man.

"The other two?" cried Thorne.

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"With his back to the wall Erbach put himself in the posture of defence"

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"They was troublesome," said Trevick. "We had to tie 'em up."

"Wait outside," said Thorne.

When he had gone he turned to Erbach. "When you are in the Street," he said, "you haven't the reputation for understanding your opponents."

"I don't know how you did it," cried Erbach, his eyes blazing with anger, "but by God, you shall rot in a Sicilian jail for this if I have any influence! My men will be back soon, and nothing can save you."

"Guess again," said Thorne pleasantly. "If you had second sight you'd see your precious crew sleeping off some doped liquor in a barn at a little village called Molara. The rest of your men have leave all night and won't be back yet awhile. If they do come what good will it do you? The men berth forward and not here."

"You're a damned fool!" cried Erbach angrily. "You can't frighten me into giving up what you want. See here," he shouted, "I've been in strikes and riots and danger from California to Chicago, and I've been threatened by half the toughs in the country. Have I ever given up to them? Do I look like a man who is going to give up? What you want is in that safe in the

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top left-hand drawer of the right compartment. How can you get it? Only through my telling you the combination. You may kill me if you like, but you'll never get it."

Thorne spoke to Paget without answering him. "Wasn't my little biographical sketch a gem?" he demanded. "Isn't this the man I told you to a fraction. Pig-headed, full of physical strength and courage, revengeful, boastful and not without hope, even in desperate emergencies." He examined Erbach with the care one might bestow upon an uncommon species of wild animal.

The millionaire controlled himself with an effort.

"I repeat," he said, "that you will never force me to give them up."

He glared with particular animosity at Paget; for he was of those who consider that hatred to all Britons is the beginning of patriotism.

"Underrating us again," cried Thorne. "I thought you were wiser by this time."

Erbach settled himself into his chair more comfortably.

"Well," he said at length, "you two young men may have drugged my crew and tied up a steward or two, but what then? Where do you come in on this deal?" He felt more assured

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from their manner that they were to offer him no physical violence, and his spirits rose. He had not enjoyed the ordeal, but he would triumph. He had examined their faces shrewdly. These were not of the stuff desperadoes were made. He had a large acquaintance with criminals. When in Chicago he thought to raise himself to eminence by the devious ways of ward politics and had not cast his eyes to financial heights. Thorne, he reflected, was some college-bred boy in love with Nina Lloyd who had the audacity to think he could beat Adolf Erbach. As for Paget, he was merely a fool Englishman who probably had a taste for novel reading. He strained his ears for the sound of returning rowers; and even when he heard nothing refused to lose heart. He saw Paget go to the cabin door and whistle for the big sailor, without alarm. What was muttered into the sailor's ear hardly interested him.

"Well," he said with a touch of satire, "you are wasting some of your valuable time, gentlemen. I am busy."

"I suppose," said Thorne quietly, "that you mean what you say as to not parting with that packet in the safe?"

"I do," said Erbach. "It's a present to my bride."

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"I hardly expected you would," said Thorne easily; "so of course we made preparations for contingencies. Now, Erbach, your press agents have flooded the American papers with stories of your attempt to form a sulphur trust. Pictures of your excursions to the hills are in the Sunday papers or will be in a couple of weeks. The little people don't believe any different, but the big fellows know there is nothing in sulphur for a man with your ambitions. I know it, too."

"Is that so?" cried the millionaire with mock admiration. "Seems I've been entertaining angels unaware. You know it, too!"

"Yes," said Thorne slowly, "and I know what you're here for. I've known for three years what you think about Harriman and Hill."

Erbach affected not to show how this shot told.

"Pinkerton man?" he inquired with an intention to offend.

"No," said Thorne. "What I know about you I learned when I was a member of the New York Stock Exchange."

"You?" cried Erbach, looking at him with vivid interest.

"I was the junior member of Buckley, Buckley & Thorne. My particular chum at Harvard was Perriton Elwell, whose father used to be a close

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associate of yours before you ruined him. I learned a great deal about you and your ways of doing business from my friend Perry."

"This don't interest me," responded Erbach coldly.

"It does interest me, though," said Thorne. "It interests me so much that I have spent all my pocket money of late keeping tabs on your doings. I know, for example, why you are reading that map so lovingly. I know the names of the agents who are buying for you in blocks big enough to be useful and yet not big enough to alarm anyone. I know your ambition to be a sort of Napoleon of railroads. You want to be able to dictate to the big fellows. I know the winning ways adopted by you to the English shareholders you met at the Cannon Street Hotel last week, when you went proxy collecting. I always liked ambition."

"You did, did you?" cried Erbach, banging the table violently. "Well, I always disliked puppies of your kind. I haven't any use for them."

Thorne took no notice of the interruption.

"I know that you either get control of the Eastern Pacific Railroad this coming week or not at all. I know that your New York manager

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gets to Brindisi to-morrow at noon, and then in this very cabin you and he plan the big move. For once you've caught the big H.'s napping and they'll experience the joy of having to be polite to each other for at least a whole day before you can be overtaken and crumpled up."

Thorne was enjoying himself immensely. He felt better in health and spirits, and for a young man possessed an immense knowledge of the intricate situation which had grown up lately in Eastern Pacific affairs. Less than three months absent from the financial centre of the world, he had managed to keep himself in touch with things remarkably well. Paget sat dumb in mute admiration. With all the many talks they had had together he could not grasp the points which seemed so plain to the business mind of the American. He had a blind faith in Thorne's financial genius, and that Erbach had accepted his statements without a shadow of dissent proved to him that they were correct. It was obvious that Erback was unwillingly conceding his opponent a deeper respect. If Thorne spoke truly, his firm stood very high in New York. Buckley, Sr., was a member of the advisory committee of the Exchange and a safe, conservative broker of the better sort. But this made no difference to his as-

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sumption that they had played their cards and lost. At all events, they would be in no position to harm him or interfere with his plans. They had ventured into a lion's den armed with pop-guns. Thus did Adolf Erbach, content to trust no man wholly, but gifted with a sublime faith in himself, regard them.

He had broken a number of men in his career. Not only those men who had harmed him, but men who had tried and failed. It was always wise, he contended, to break the latter class lest they would succeed in a fresh attempt. And these two young men had earned more hatred through their interference in his private affairs than any others since the days in Chicago, which he tried never to think about. A smile of contempt spread itself over his hard face. He admired bluff only when it succeeded.

"Is that all?" he demanded.

"We have a proposition to make," said Thorne. "If you give us the letters and the diary you can go to financial perdition or glory in your own fashion. We'll take no hand in the game."

"That proposition is turned down right off the reel!" cried the financier. "I have never," he went on with intense conviction, "met any two men so hopelessly crazy as you are. I'm a re-

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vengeful man. I never let up; it's not my way, but you two aren't worth fighting. No, sir."

"Tell me this," cried Thorne, leaning forward earnestly. "Am I wrong in stating that this big game you are playing means your financial salvation?"

Erbach pondered for a moment.

"What do you mean?" he demanded.

"I mean that if you fail here you'll have to start over again just as you did when you tried single-handed to break up the Produce Exchange crowd in Chicago ten years or so ago."

"I'm taking the risk," said Erbach, unable to resist an inclination to brag. "But it's as good as finished already, with me on the top."

"That's your little miscalculation," said the other. "You mean that when Anderson gets to Brindisi and you meet him, then the matter will be decided. You are waiting for his reports."

Erbach experienced a return of the suspicious feeling which had been his earlier in the interview. He was afraid he had talked too much. It was a rare weakness with him. The secretary to whom he paid ten thousand dollars a year, who had unfortunately gone to a masquerade ball in

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a Palermo hotel, received his salary principally for his gift of fluent speech from which no particular meaning could be extracted.

"What if I am?" he asked.

"Simply this," said Thorne, "that when he comes you will not be here. You will be our guest on a turbine yacht five knots an hour faster than your boat. We shall do some delightful cruising among the Ægean Islands. Meanwhile you will have your opportunity to begin life over again. We shall not win the letters, but you certainly won't get control of the Eastern Pacific."

"What do you think of our peculiar brand of lunacy?" asked Paget, pleasantly breaking into the conversation. "We're rather proud of it."

Erbach turned on him savagely and for a moment looked as though he would hurl himself at the speaker. But things were too serious for that. The strange coolness and self-possession of the men was explained. They had drawn him out, laughing the while in their sleeves, and now solemnly proposed to abduct him. If they gained their ends absolute ruin was in store. He alone of the men associated with him in the venture had the master mind to grapple with the myriad details of the great deal. From his unknown retreat he had been moving his pieces like a chess player

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and had kept in touch with every one of his adversaries' moves. A day's absence would be a calamity; a week would mean such a financial collapse as is seldom seen. This on the one side and his passion for the beautiful daughter of Colonel Lloyd on the other.

He fought for time.

"Don't you know what a serious crime you contemplate?" he said. "And I don't believe you could carry it out, either."

"Don't be fool enough to believe that," said Thorne. "Have we made any false moves so far? Here you are absolutely alone. We have four men aboard ready to truss you up like a chicken and row you to our yacht. Steam is up and before anyone is the wiser off we go. We're provisioned for a long cruise, and for a month at least we can't be caught."

"You will be in the end," cried Erbach.

Thorne shrugged his shoulders carelessly. "We have calculated that, too," he said. "It's all in the game."

"God!" cried Erbach in a gust of passion. "You shall pay for this!"

"That's in the game, too," said Paget imperturbably. He walked quietly to the door and gave a slight whistle. Footsteps were heard in

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the passage. "Now," he said to the millionaire, "you've heard the offer. You've heard, too, the heavy feet of our men. Sixty seconds is enough for you to decide. What is it?"

He had stepped between Thorne and Erbach in case the rage of the financier should lead him to make an attack on his friend, who was physically in no condition for such violence. Paget held himself warily. He had a boxer's respect for those great arms and shoulders.

Erbach felt himself weakening. There was a deadly certainty of success in the faces of his opponents. He was alone on the ship. There was no help for it.

"Will you swear not to make any mention"—he pointed to the great map of the Eastern Pacific route—"of this? That's part of the bargain, eh?"

"We want only the letters and the diary," said Thorne impatiently. "You fight the rest out without our interference."

Erbach looked at them with a trace of anxiety. He decided that he could believe them. Paget followed him to the safe. He had vague ideas that such receptacles were often the size of rooms, and that Erbach, like the villain of the melodrama, might secrete himself therein and hiss curses

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through the keyhole. But it was a safe of the usual type, and in the drawer indicated the precious package lay. He passed it over to Thorne, who examined the twenty letters and their signature closely.

"It's all right!" he exclaimed, putting them and the leather-bound book in an inner pocket.

"And there's just one more thing," added Paget pleasantly. "She might not know that you sent her these. I want you to write a little note, releasing her from her engagement. The excuse I leave to you."

After a moment's hesitation Erbach penned a few lines and handed them over to Paget. He could hardly trust himself to speak.

"You'll pay," he cried; "you'll pay a millionfold for this!"

"It's all in the game," said the other amiably.

At a signal from Paget, Trevick strode into the cabin. Erbach glanced at him indignantly.

"Here, what's this?" he cried.

"A mark of respect for your resourceful nature," Paget explained. "If we left you free to range the decks you'd probably scuttle our little boat or blow our brains out."

Dexterously the big sailor pinioned the millionaire and trussed him fast to his chair. Erbach's

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forehead grew red and the veins stood out purple at the indignity of it all, but he kept silence.

"It won't be for long," said Paget. "We shall rouse the wireless operator from his slumbers and say you need him." He thought he detected a gleam of hope in the bound man's eye. Unkindly he set himself to dislodge it. "I'm afraid you won't be able to utilise his professional services just yet, because our skipper is rather keen on wireless himself and had the misfortune in examining yours to do some trifling damage. I don't understand these things myself, but he tells me that it requires some hours of work on it before you can send or receive messages."

Erbach stared straight before him, uttering never a word.

Ten minutes later a sleepy disciple of Marconi released him from his position and bound himself by a solemn oath to say nothing of the unexplained occurrence. About this time the *Sea-born* moved slowly out into the Tyrrhenian Sea.

In deference to his father's wish, Paget had kept him informed by cable of his several changes of address. Once or twice he had received short letters from him breathing, it seemed to the son, a spirit of affection which he had not previously known. He had arranged that before he left

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Palermo a messenger should go to the Poste Restante and see what mail there might be. The man brought back a cablegram from Dr. Bagot.

"Your father is in a very critical condition; come at once."

He called for Captain Penfold.

"I must get to Naples," he said, "as soon as possible. Push her as fast as she can go."

He found Thorne lying in his deck-house very white, so white that he seemed a different being from the strong, resolute man who had helped to checkmate Erbach an hour before. Paget could hardly check a cry of dismay. Thorne looked up and smiled reassuringly.

"A little hemorrhage," he said. "I exerted myself too much. What's your trouble, old man?"

Paget flung himself into one of the low basket chairs and handed the wire to his friend.

"Bad luck," said Thorne. "Where have you to go?"

"The extreme western part of England," he was told. "I shall leave the boat at Naples and go home overland. By sea would take me too long. I don't know how long I may be detained at home—perhaps for some weeks. You had bet-

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ter send off those letters directly we get there. I shall have to drive like fury to the station."

"They shall go," cried Thorne, "just as soon as I can take them." His face brightened as he thought of it. "Didn't it go off well! I feel that I shall never have another sad hour. To beard Erbach in his own cabin and make him give up without a struggle!" He gave a faint chuckle of enjoyment. "Of course," he added in graver tone, "Erbach isn't going to accept this as an act of Providence. Look out for him."

"I shan't lose sleep over him," smiled Paget. "Where shall we meet again?" he asked. "And what is to become of the *Sea-born*, now that she has accomplished the end we bought her for?"

"Why not keep her?" said Thorne. "I'll take her if you want to sell your interest. I'm a whole lot better, and I'm going to have some fun yet." He spoke with the assurance which is usually to be found in tubercular patients. Paget, who could not share his sanguine outlook, had not the heart to express doubt.

"All right," he agreed. "Now I wouldn't advise you to stay in Naples an hour longer than you need. It's beastly hot and unsanitary in the summer. Why not cruise about in your own sweet way and let me know what's happening?" He

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paused for a moment. "My address is St. Vian, Cornwall, England. I'm afraid John Paget won't find me."

Thorne looked up quickly. "Why not?" he demanded. "Aren't you John Paget?"

In a few words Paget explained how it was he became Paget. He did this with a perfect confidence in his friend's discretion. Thorne was keenly interested.

"All right, my Lord," he laughed, "it shall be as Your Lordship commands. To think I have been living with a despised sprig of aristocracy without suspecting the contaminating influence! When I used to write for the *Lampoon* at Harvard I went for you hot and strong. Where's your glass and your drawl, sonny, and where is the drooping moustache all cavalrymen wear?"

"They don't," corrected Paget. "Most of us in the mounted branch are clean shaven, like you fellows. Infantrymen affect moustaches, though."

They sat talking for an hour or more, the familiar affectionate talk of two men who like one another and are knit by association into a friendship which has not to reassure itself by protestation. Always popular among his fellows, Paget had never known a man so intimately as Jarvis Thorne. Directly he was able to leave his father,

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whom he did not believe to be seriously ill, he determined to see that Thorne had the best medical advice the world afforded. His was a friendship, the Englishman felt, he could not afford to lose.

"Old man," he said presently, "your temperature is going up and you ought to be very careful."

"I shall live to dance at your wedding," cried the other. "But at present I believe I shall sleep." He held out his hand. "Farewell, my noble friend."

Threading its way through the innumerable craft in the congested harbour of Naples the *Seaborn's* fast little launch landed Paget near the station. He was lucky enough to get the mail train connecting with the P. L. M., and had started for home before Thorne awakened from a troubled night. He had been sleeping when his friend looked through the screened window, and betrayed his exhaustion so obviously that Paget had gone without a farewell.

Dr. Bagot met him at the end of his long drive to St. Vian.

"He is very ill," said the physician; "much worse than you expect."

Mountcastle's heart sank.

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"Is it his heart?" he demanded.

Dr. Bagot nodded acquiescence.

"You must come at once," he said.

The Earl, looking very much the same as usual, smiled faintly when Mountcastle came into the room.

"It was Bagot's fault," he said. "He sent for you unauthorised."

"It was against my will that he went," returned the doctor.

"Why didn't you tell me?" demanded Mountcastle. It seemed suddenly that he had betrayed an appalling selfishness in remaining so carelessly ignorant of his father's condition. Chronic gout, he had always heard, affected the heart. For years the Earl had suffered periodical attacks, but he had grown so used to them that he could not imagine they were likely to bring about his death.

"I'll ring if I want you, Bagot," said the Earl. When the physician had closed the door his father turned to him with a smile. "Well?" he demanded. "Success or failure?"

"Success," said his son. "It went off splendidly." In the grief he was experiencing he could think of nothing but his desertion of a man who had the first claim upon him, a father who had

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always been indulgent and kind. "Why didn't you warn me?" he demanded.

"Because I wanted you to go," said the other. "My dear lad, you couldn't have helped me. If you spoke truly, this girl needed you much more than I. And what did it matter? Here I am alive and happy, and this wonderful girl won't have to marry the man she loathes. It seems to me it has worked out in accordance with the best precepts of fiction and the drama. Tell me about it."

He listened eagerly.

"I wish I could have seen her," he said at length.

"Why won't you?" cried his son.

He shook his head.

"My boy," he said, "Bagot is right. I don't think it will be very long now." He gave a smile that had something of bitterness in it. "I am not dreading it very much. I have ridden straighter than most people think."

For a week there seemed little change in the Earl's health. The Princess Castelazzi and Cyril Trevenose were summoned to the castle, and it seemed to all but Bagot that they would be able to leave assured of partial convalescence, at least, when one night they were called to the sick room. The old man, with the indomitable spirit of a long

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line of men who, whatever of the virtues they may have lacked, possessed at least a high courage, was least perturbed of the group. When the summer morning crept into the apartment, putting to shame the artificial light, John Paget Courtenay Trevenose found himself the eighteenth Earl of St. Vian.

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## CHAPTER SIXTEEN

### THE END OF THE FIGHT

When Thorne awoke after Paget had left the vessel, he sent for Captain Penfold and demanded to know how long the *Sea-born* had been at anchor. He was reassured to learn that she had steamed very fast from Palermo and had been at anchor not an hour. There was always a dread of Erbach's attempt to get the letters back. To guard against any accident of this sort, Penfold and the Trevicks accompanied him to the central post-office, where in a registered package the things were mailed to Nina Lloyd at the address near Bar Harbor, which she had given him as her summer home until September, when she would return to New York for the marriage. It had been his intention to send a letter to Paget at the same time he mailed the package to Maine, but he was overcome by the great heat of the city. He would write on board and send it ashore.

Jarvis Thorne had always been a fighter. When his superb physical condition had allowed him to be the best Number Seven who ever welded the two sides of a crew into harmony on American water-



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ways, he was one of the Harvard men who did not merit the taunt that he was an alumnus of a great institution who had put aside scholarship for athletics. He had a keen, discriminating mind and an indomitable faith in himself. Directly he was rowed aboard the *Sea-born* he felt that he was in for a very bad attack. Never had he experienced such a profound lassitude. Accustomed to following the instructions of a noted Philadelphia physician, he thought he would be able to attend to himself without summoning medical help. Thus it was that when still in sight of Vesuvius he was prostrated from severe hemorrhages. He had the will to live in a very marked degree. That depression which obsessed him on meeting Paget was due more to the bitter memories evoked by the sight of the girl who could not love him, and the fate in store for her, than to his own physical condition. Now that she was freed by the efforts of two men who loved her, and he had formed a deep attachment for his friend Paget, he cast all gloomy thoughts from him. The letter that he was to have despatched to England was forgotten. He told himself that directly he was better he would write a faithful account of his doings.

When Captain Penfold found him in a high

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fever and raving deliriously he was at a loss what to do. Naples, unhealthful, unsanitary despite her marvellous beauty, lay behind him many miles, and he was heading for the more temperate North. One of the men had some training as a sick bay steward of the Royal Navy. He was installed as attendant while the vessel's course was laid for Nice. Penfold knew that in this famous health resort there were English and American physicians and hospitals where his employer would receive the best attention. They had taken on enough coal at Naples to enable them to make a very fast run. The engineer, with a pride that a convert to turbines takes in his machinery, aided his skipper, and the green hills that lie along the French Riviera came into sight in a marvellously short time.

Thorne was removed to a private sanatorium recommended by his consul and lay for nearly a month fighting for life. He was emaciated beyond belief when Penfold, at his request, was shown onto the balcony where his bed was. He had recognised the inevitable; but he met his fate with the cheery *insouciance* which had ever marked him. He could not understand why it was that he had become reconciled at last. Someone had lent him a volume of Browning, and he had found

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his own spirit in those courageous lines in Prospice: "I was ever a fighter, so one fight more, the best and the last."

Penfold sat close to him so that he might not have to raise his voice. The sailor was immeasurably shocked. There was no chance to offer the customary hopes for recovery.

"Do you know Cornwall well?" said Thorne.

"I was born in Falmouth, sir," returned the other. "I married a girl from Penzance, and my home, when ashore, is Flushing, just across from Falmouth."

"Do you know of a place named St. Vian? I don't think it's a very big place."

"It's a little fishing village on the north coast, not far from Tintagel," said the captain.

"I want you to take the *Sea-born* there."

"There's no safe anchorage for a vessel our size along there," protested the captain. "It's a dangerous coast any time of the day:

*"'From Padstow Point to Lundy light*
*A watery grave by day or night—'*

that's an old saying in those parts, sir. There is a sort of private harbour built by the Earl of St. Vian for his own yacht; he lets fishing boats

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or, in fact, anything else make use of it in dirty weather, but it's no anchorage for any other man's yacht."

"I don't think he'll object," returned Thorne. "Quite between ourselves, skipper, Mr. John Paget was a name assumed for a purpose. You aided us to carry that purpose out. He should be called Viscount Mountcastle. His father is the Earl of St. Vian."

Whatever astonishment the Cornishman may have felt he kept, with the self-possession of his people, to himself.

"Then he's the Earl now," he said after a momentary pause. "I saw by the *Western Morning News* that his father died about three weeks ago. The old Earl," he added in explanation, "was for many years an invalid."

Thorne sighed. So his death would come at a moment when his friend was in bitter trouble! There was a silence for some minutes. Penfold was angry to think he had mentioned the Earl's decease. He felt it was unpardonably clumsy.

Presently he saw the thin white hand of Thorne reach out for something by his bedside. He handed a little package to him.

"It's my watch," he said. "I shan't need it. It's timed some fast trials, Penfold, has that old

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split second watch." He handed an unaddressed envelope to the sailor. "There's some money to be divided among the men. They're good lads and I don't want them to think I have forgotten them."

"They haven't forgotten," cried the sailor. "I've never sailed under better owners and never shall. We're all upset over this. There isn't a man there," he concluded, lapsing into his native idiom, "but isn't feeling as wisht as a winnard."

"It's all in the day's run, I suppose," said Thorne. "When you see Lord St. Vian I want you to give him some messages. I hoped to write them, but the doctors won't let me. Tell him that I mailed the package to America. And tell him that my share of the *Sea-born* goes to him. You've got that?"

"I shall remember," said Penfold.

Thorne held out a white hand and smiled with his old cheerfulness.

"Good-bye, skipper, good-bye. You'll wait in harbour till they send you word. You understand?"

Penfold bowed and passed out, not trusting himself to say anything. He left, rebelling, in human fashion, against the death of a young man

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to whom life offered so much. In the careless disregard of human health laws—a carelessness which takes its dreadful toll of all classes—he saw only the hard hand of a divine Providence inexorably bent upon human destruction.

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## CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

### A RECEPTION AT THE WHITE HOUSE

After a wearisome struggle against adverse conditions in the cotton crop, Colonel Lloyd found himself financially secure and able to take the rest that he needed. Coming north, he proposed to his wife that they should make a little tour in Europe. To this she was decidedly opposed. She pointed out that preparations for Nina's marriage forbade. Disappointed, the old man asked his daughter to go instead. She begged of him not to expect it of her. She, too, declared she was tired of Europe, and wanted only the Maine cliffs and sea.

Trained during his married life to yield toward his wife in nearly everything, the old Southerner supposed with a feeling of dismay that this discipline was equally expected of him with his daughter. Averse to voyaging alone, he determined to forgo his trip and linger at Bar Harbor.

It was one of his chief pleasures to sail in a little thirty-foot yawl up and down the coast, and to have Nina with him. It was his pride that she could sail a boat as well as he himself. One



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late afternoon they were running before the wind on the homeward way past Schooner Head. On the cliff above was a beautiful colonial house wherein lived one of his daughter's closest friends, Agatha Langdon.

"By the way," he said, looking at the dwelling, "how is it I never see you and Agatha together now? And what has become of Virginia Vandeveer."

The girl answered with a studied carelessness.

"I think we are just a little tired of each other," she said.

"No more?" he demanded.

"What else?" she returned.

"Heaven alone may guess," he retorted. It sometimes occasioned him a twinge of regret that he understood women so little. He conceived that women's ways were plainly discernible, if not to him, at least to many men. Wherein, it may be seen, that he gave credit where it was not due.

By this time the girl had settled down to the rôle she was to play. Only her mother saw through it. She laughed aside her father's frowns of imperfect understanding.

"We bore each other," she yawned. "Virginia thinks life is real and life is earnest. Agatha fulminates against all sorts of strange

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things and wishes matrimony were always holy. It's a pity some device can't be patented whereby reformers can consume their own smoke."

In her heart she longed for her old companions. The reproach in their eyes hurt her.

Her father shook his head.

"I don't know what it is, Nina," he exclaimed, "but something has altered you strangely!"

"Sapient parent!" she laughed. "Wisdom comes with years. I have five grey hairs already!"

When they came to the house, Nina stretched herself on a long chair on the piazza and asked listlessly whether any mail had come. Her father, hoping to hear from his Southern agents, went to find out and presently returned with a number of letters and a sealed package, which he passed to her.

"From Italy," he said, "by the stamp. Another present, I suppose."

Erbach from nearly every port he visited sent her some present, often of rare value, and this, she presumed, was another hateful reminder. It was not Erbach's writing nor, indeed, of anyone she knew. She could not know that Jarvis Thorne on the day he sent it was almost delirious from his illness and almost in a state of collapse.

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Colonel Lloyd at her side paid no more attention to the girl. The reports from the South were favourable, and he was indulging in pleasurable meditation when some little exclamation made him turn to his daughter. At first, he thought from her pallor that she was ill, and he sprang to his feet in haste. She waved him back to his seat.

"I'm all right," she said.

Not understanding, he watched her wrap the string again about the little package and fold it carefully away. When this was done, she turned to him and he saw that the eyes in which since childhood he had seen no tears, were full of them. He knelt beside her and put his arm around her.

"What is it?" he asked gently. "My dear little girl, what is it?"

Presently she smiled through her tears, and her face grew radiant.

"My celestial crown has come back," she told him, "in a little brown paper package from Italy."

"How can I know what you mean?" he demanded.

"I'll tell you part of it," she returned. "First, we will start for that European trip when you like. Secondly, no one named Erbach will have a darling like you for a father-in-law. Thirdly, I

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am going to ask Agatha and Virginia to come to dinner."

He made a gesture of despair.

"Whence this revolution?"

She sprang to her feet and gave him a kiss.

"All in good time!" she cried gaily; and sought out her mother.

Mrs. Lloyd, not too gracious at being disturbed in her preparations for the elaborate function she was attending at a neighbour's house, looked a little coldly at her daughter.

Nina turned to the maid who was dressing Mrs. Lloyd's hair and said:

"Come back in five minutes."

"Really," exclaimed her mother, "you might consult my convenience, I think."

"I am," returned the girl, handing her the package.

The elder woman flushed when she saw what it was, and then, walking to a jewel safe, locked it in.

"What does it mean?" she queried.

"That I am free," said her daughter triumphantly. She handed Mrs. Lloyd the lines Erbach had been forced to send. There was no doubt as to his bold writing. It was an unconditional release.

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"Father and I," continued the girl, "are going for a European trip as soon as we can get ready."

"You lose no time," retorted her mother.

"What do you mean?" cried the other, flushing.

"There, there!" exclaimed her mother, more kindly. "Don't upset the dressing-table or I shall never get ready in time for dinner."

Some chord of an almost extinct sympathy overcame her as she glanced at the beautiful daughter whom she knew so little. She was not noted for demonstrations of affection. She patted Nina's hand almost affectionately.

"Now, my dear," she said, "if you'll tell Angela to come back, I shall not be late after all."

Her hostess was piqued at the defection of two girls whose social importance could not be gainsaid either in New York or Bar Harbor.

"At the last moment," she deplored, "Virginia Vandeveer and Agatha Langdon sent the most trivial excuses."

Nor were these the only engagements in the near future broken by these girls. They accompanied Colonel Lloyd and Nina to New York three days later and saw them off.

So sure was the girl of her lover, that she

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allowed no foolish pride to stand in her way when the reward was so great. Knowing so little of him, she was in doubt as how best to find his address. It was at Mrs. Dean's boarding-house that she first found him, and thither she took her way, leaving her father at the hotel. He knew nothing of her new-found gaiety, except he judged it to be due to the broken engagement. There was something almost sacred, she felt, about her love for Paget, and she could not bear to talk about it. Even to her two girl friends she had not confessed, although, perhaps, they, being women, had guessed something of it. Mrs. Dean had no knowledge whatever. To her, John Paget was merely one of the hundreds who came into her busy life and passed out.

At a library, Nina consulted army, naval, law and civil service directories. There were no John Pagets. At last, she bethought her of Father Cyril—and drove to the house. It was now a boarding-house, she found. The proprietress, not a little proud that her house had been occupied by so famous a cleric, said that he had succeeded to a fortune and had built, or was building, a home near Bournemouth. Thither the girl went. The orphanage or home, partly built, was easy to discover; but of the Superior's whereabouts noth-

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ing could be gathered definitely. She learned only that he was making a retreat and was to be summoned therefrom by no one. The letter she addressed to him at the new home was returned by a secretary.

Failure met her everywhere. And when after a visit to Bruges no happier fortune awaited her, she consented to visit Egypt with her father. There, he saw, with genuine concern, that her listlessness was returning; and attributing it to a desire to be home again, planned to spend Christmas at their Washington residence.

. . . . . .

The new Earl found Mr. Danby, who was by profession a barrister, a very great aid in settling the enormous amount of business connected with such a vast estate as that of the Trevenoses. The librarian was promoted to a general supervision of it, working in conjunction with the family lawyers. As for Doctor Bagot, who had given up a large practice to be with his patron, he settled down in London, taking up his favourite study of biology.

As the days and weeks went by and presently drew themselves into months, Lord St. Vian became very much troubled by lack of news from Thorne. A hundred fears overwhelmed him at the inex-

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plicable silence. Had illness or Erbach got the better of the resolute young American? And he was troubled, too, lest the girl for whom they had risked so much should not have benefited thereby. In none of the columns of the society papers he pored over was any mention to be seen of Erbach or the Lloyds. In no yachting news was there any mention of the *Sea-born*. He hunted through back numbers of shipping periodicals with no result. He had so strong a faith in his friend that the employment of a detective seemed almost like an act of treachery. Directly the imperative affairs were settled he determined to set out on a search. He had last seen the boat at Naples. From Naples, then, he would prosecute his inquiries.

Before breakfast of the day he was leaving he rode along the cliffs by St. Vian's Cross. Far to the south passed the great vessels on their thousand-league journey to America. To the northwest Lundy Island loomed shadowy and vague out of the blue waters. He rode nearer the cliff's edge so that he might take a last look at the little granite-built harbour which had been so dear to his father, which had saved hundreds of lives when the brave little fishing boats, flying before the winter storms, had found there a shel-

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ter erected by private hands to shame a lax government.

Quietly lying at her moorings was the *Sea-born.* And her flag was at half-mast. He rode back to the castle instantly. A footman told him that Captain Penfold was awaiting him.

He pressed the sailor's hand cordially. Toward the men who had helped him in his quest he felt ever an affection which showed itself in a hundred actions.

He half feared to ask as to the flag. It might be out of respect to his late father, but he felt that it was for the more recent death of his best friend. Penfold told him very simply what had happened since he left the vessel in Naples. In the midst of his natural sorrow there came the happiness in knowing that Nina must have received the letters. This gave him time to rest quietly and ponder as to his future actions. The most important thing would be to find the girl again. Of her address he had little knowledge. Inquiry at the Bloomsbury boarding-house elicited nothing. The same fortune attended his efforts to find Miss Scott's from her Bruges *pension.* She had gone and left no address.

He addressed a letter to Miss Lloyd in care of the postoffice at New York. It was returned in

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the regulation way. She had not lived in New Orleans for some years, he knew, so he did not write there.

An elderly relative high in the diplomatic service of his country rallied him upon his changed manner. It was when he had taken his seat for the first time in the House of Lords.

"Do something, my dear fellow," cried his uncle. "Mix with people more."

"I hate people," said his nephew savagely.

"I'm sorry," said the other. "The Prime Minister asked me last night whether I thought you would go as military attaché to Washington."

"Is there the opportunity?" asked the young man in a changed voice.

"It's yours for the asking," said the diplomat. "You are young, can stand losses at bridge and the little expenses of the younger set there, and it would be a good training." General the Honourable Reginald Trevenose had that pride of family which felt there was nothing the head of it would not adorn. You'll like Washington," he said. "I was there in Pauncefote's time, and it's much livelier now. The only pity is that Washington isn't a suburb of New York. Are you keen on it?"

"I never felt keener!" cried the younger man

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brightly. "My dear uncle, this is awfully decent of you. You really think I can get it?"

The Prime Minister, who knew the Earl's reputation as a soldier and liked him personally, gazetted the appointment, and by the first week in November he reached Washington.

Those of his companions at the Embassy who were acquainted with American society of the class which has the entrée to official circles in Washington remembered Miss Lloyd.

"I know," said one of the secretaries. "She was that awfully pretty girl who was going to marry Erbach. She chucked the brute when he smashed up."

"Did he smash?" cried Lord St. Vian eagerly.

"Came an awful cropper," returned the other. "Wanted to corner something or other very big. Railways or something immense. They cornered him, instead. I believe he's cornering lumber in Alaska. Pretty rough to lose fortune and wife at one swoop!"

It was the first definitely reassuring news he had had. His spirits rose instantly.

"Where is she?" he demanded.

"Up the Nile or somewhere in Egypt, I think," the secretary returned. "This rotter Erbach would have broken Lloyd to pieces if he hadn't

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been smashed up himself. It was in all the papers," he concluded vaguely; "quite a big thing."

The secretary was right in a way. Erbach, with what was left of his fortune, had gone to Alaska. And Miss Lloyd and her father, as we know, had gone to Egypt. It was partly a business trip, since the old Southern planter had always desired to see the African rival to American cotton. They had been, however, in Washington a week when Lord St. Vian reached it.

His first glimpse of official Washington *in excelsis* took place at one of the great receptions at the White House. The presence of the Corps Diplomatique, of the attachés and other officers in uniform, makes these receptions as brilliant as those at the European capital. A love for colour and pageantry was a marked feature of Nina Lloyd. With a companion she watched the various members passing the President, who stood at the top of the room. The Lloyds had taken a house at the Capital for the season, and were *persona grata* in the circles which are the most difficult to enter. She had not altered much in six months. Her face had grown a little harder, perhaps, and there was a look of boredom which she had not always possessed, but she was the same

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brilliantly beautiful woman who attracted instant admiration. She was standing with a witty young American, who promised to make a career for himself. He knew everyone and pointed out what notables the girl did not recognise.

"You see the man talking to the President?" he said.

Nina glanced at an officer in the blue and gold of the British Hussars, who was chatting with the nation's Executive.

"I saw the back of him just now," she returned, "and was overpowered by the gold braid and glint of medals. I wish our men had prettier uniforms. It would make our official functions so much more brilliant. I have always thought that the European women must have designed those uniforms—they're so becoming. Who is the gorgeous individual, Mr. Landon?"

"The new military attaché at the British Embassy," she was told. "He's the Earl of St. Vian, and gifted with an enormous fortune, which will probably upset some of our humourists. For the rest, he has many estates and titles and is a bachelor."

"St. Vian," she repeated slowly. "St. Vian—I think I remember reading about their castle in the West of England. It is a wonderful me-

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diæval sort of place, full of art treasures they won't sell. I met one of them once. The family name is Trevenose, you know. Father Cyril Trevenose is the young Ritualist who is setting London by the ears on account of the sins of its society. I met him once quite informally." She smiled at the recollection. "He is not so violent as he is painted." She remembered her astonishment at the nursery full of toys into which she had stumbled. "He does a lot for crippled children."

Then her thoughts went back to that day at Sluys in the happiest week of her life, when she walked over the dunes with the John Paget she loved.

"Why do you look so sad?" demanded her companion.

"A woman always feels sad at an official reception," she retorted, forcing a smile. "It's the one place where her gowns are eclipsed. How can I look as gorgeous as that Hussar, for instance, with medals and stars and orders and yards of lace and gold braid?"

"They say he's a crackerjack at polo," said Landon with enthusiasm. "His regiment won the British Army polo cup three years in succession with his playing. He's got a corking lot of

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ponies in training, I hear. We want him at Chevy Chase. Those Meadow Brook men think there's no combination can beat them."

She listened with scant interest. All her thoughts were of distant Bruges and the man from whom each day she looked to have some sign, some token, that he had not forgotten. If only he could learn that she was free, she knew he would come. If not, what hope had she? She was too acute an observer not to have seen that destiny wrecks happiness most usually by the little accidents of life. A lost train, a strayed letter, a misinterpreted glance—these things Fate uses more often than tragic calamities.

Landon talked on enthusiastically of his favourite game, but she was not listening.

Suddenly he saw her start and then turn very pale. Almost involuntarily, it seemed to her companion, she took a step forward and stared very fixedly at some one of the many walking in their direction from the other side of the room where the President was receiving.

He could see that it was at Lord St. Vian she was gazing, as he advanced toward her talking to a well-known Washington hostess. He was not the only one who observed the girl. A singular emotion possessed Landon. Instinctively he felt

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that the mystery of the girl's alteration of manner, of her different attitude to her world, was to be explained. Something drew the Earl's eyes to hers, some strange, subtle sympathy, for Landon saw him stop suddenly and stare into the girl's face.

St. Vian's stern face lost its look of repression, and there came into it a look of contentment, almost of rest. Quickly he glanced at Nina. Her lips were parted in a smile of radiant happiness.

With a bare gesture of apology, Lord St. Vian left his companion and came over to Nina and took her arm in his. Then, without any word spoken between them, they were lost in the vaster crowd which had not seen.

THE END

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